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The Relationship Between School-based Management and School Improvement

by

Jerome Gregory Delaney

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational Administration

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1995

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in loving memory of

my parents, Patrick and Margaret, who taught me the

value of education

and

James Delaney, who, as a father-in-law, I could have

asked for no better .

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined teachers' perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. A case study approach was utilized whereby the researcher spent four weeks in each of three schools (an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school) in the Edmonton Public School District, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada interviewing and observing teachers and school administrators.

These interview and observation data were subjected to qualitative analysis and yielded a number of emergent categories and themes. The study was driven by the following general research question: Do teachers and school administrators perceive school-based management to result in school improvement? The subsidiary research questions were as follows:

- Do teachers and school administrators perceive school improvement to be a goal of school-based management?
- What school improvement results, if any, do teachers and school administrators perceive occurring from the implementation of school-based management?
- What differences, if any, exist between what teachers and school administrators perceive those school improvement results to be?
- What features or characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as encouraging or facilitating school improvement?
- What features or characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as hindering or impeding school improvement?

The study found that teachers and school administrators did perceive school-based management to result in school improvement. The study's findings included a discussion of various features and characteristics which encouraged school improvement and those which impeded school improvement. A major finding of the study was the importance of the principal's leadership style in sustaining a successful relationship between school-based management and school improvement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In much of the industrialized world during the 1970s and the 1980s economic restructuring, the advent of new technology, concerns about inadequate academic performance on an international level, and an increasingly pluralistic society led to calls for school improvement. A multitude of studies condemning what some critics have referred to as "the rising tide of mediocrity" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5) in education resulted in governments at the local, provincial/state and federal levels directing their attention to this concern. In Canada this concern was exemplified by several inquiries and commissions (e.g., Newfoundland Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education, 1992; Radwanski, 1987; Sullivan, 1988) set up to investigate the "problem" and to recommend corrective courses of action.

As a result of these inquiries and commissions a number of jurisdictions introduced a variety of school improvement initiatives such as promoting greater parental involvement, decentralizing decision making, increasing teachers' involvement in curriculum reform, promoting greater emphasis on the quality of teaching in the classroom, stressing the importance of resource-based teaching, and encouraging schools to engage in participatory decision making. One of the initiatives heavily promoted in the literature as a way of effecting improvements in the quality of education was school-based management. Although it had been in existence in some North American

jurisdictions such as the Edmonton Public School District and New York City since the 1970s (Herman & Herman, 1993, p. 4), this wave of inquiries in the 1980s and early 1990s created new interest in school-based management.

According to David (1989), "school-based management is becoming the centerpiece of the current wave of reform" (p. 45). David's observation was reconfirmed by Cheng (1993) who stated that "current school-based management movements aim at enhancement of autonomy of members at the site-level in creating advantageous conditions for improvement, innovation, accountability and continuous professional growth" (p. 7).

The need for school improvement appears to be at the center of educational reform. Goodlad (1984) perceived the greatest hindrance to educational reform as being the failure to see the local schools as the focal point for improvement. He believed that staff dialogue about problems and issues, participation in decision making, involvement in actions taken, and accountability for evaluating results were key components to include in any school improvement plan. David (1989) agreed with this viewpoint and considered school-based management to be a way to change schools into effective learning environments through the empowerment of school staff with the decision-making authority, flexibility, and resources needed to make the appropriate changes. Similarly, White (1991) viewed school-based management as a program or philosophy adopted by schools or school districts to improve education by increasing the autonomy of the staff to make school or site decisions.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine teachers' and school administrators' perceptions with respect to the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Specifically, the study was designed to determine whether or not teachers and school administrators perceived school-based management to result in school improvement.

Statement of the Problem

The current literature focusing on various aspects of school administration abounds with writings on school-based management. Those writings have basically taken either a favorable or unfavorable stance towards school-based management. Many writers (e.g., Allen, 1991; David, 1989; Shelton, 1992; White, 1991) are in agreement that there is a dearth of empirical research on the effects of school-based management especially as they relate to the process of school improvement. That void includes a lack of research whereby schools operating under a school-based management model are studied in order to ascertain how the key players in those schools--the teachers and school administrators--perceive the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. The problem for this study was to analyze the perceptions of those two groups in order to determine what that relationship was and, specifically, to decide whether or not school-based management resulted in school improvement.

Research Questions

The study was guided by a general research question and several subsidiary research questions.

General Research Question

Do teachers and school administrators perceive school-based management to result in school improvement?

Subsidiary Research Questions

1. Do teachers and school administrators perceive school improvement to be a goal of school-based management?

2. What school improvement results, if any, do teachers and school administrators perceive occurring from the implementation of school-based management?

3. What differences, if any, exist between what teachers and school administrators perceive those school improvement results to be?

4. What features/characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as encouraging or facilitating school improvement?

5. What features/characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as hindering or impeding school improvement?

Significance of the Study for Research and Practice

To date, the literature on school-based management has consisted primarily of conceptual arguments, how-to guides, and testimonials from practitioners (David, 1989, p. 45). Although a recent examination by the researcher of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database from 1984 to April, 1995 identified over 1070 entries on the topic of school-based management, a limited number of these articles are

based on empirical research. In fact, this is a consistent criticism of writers who have examined the school-based management literature (e.g., David, 1989; Levin, 1992; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; White, 1991).

There presently exists a serious gap in the research on school-based management as a vehicle for effecting school improvement. Writers, proponents, and practitioners of school-based management have suggested that a variety of positive school results emanate from the implementation of this form of school governance. These results include increased productivity, morale, and support by educators, students, and community members (Bair, 1992).

According to Passow (1990), many teachers have grown wary of the increased numbers of school improvement initiatives thrust upon them in recent years. He noted that the "Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986, p. 26) observed that teachers 'are immensely frustrated--to the point of cynicism'--seeing [school improvement] activities bringing about little change in those things that directly affect teaching and learning" (p. 13). This study may help to alleviate some of this negativity, especially if it is found that school-based management is perceived by teachers and school administrators to have a positive influence on school improvement. Such a finding might facilitate efforts by boards to introduce this concept to schools interested in decentralizing decision making. Also, it is anticipated that this study will make a worthwhile contribution to the body of knowledge on school-based management, thus helping to fill the present void in empirical research on school-based management.

Terminology

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used:

- school-based management: "a structure and a process that allows greater building level decision making related to some or all the areas of instruction, personnel, budget, policy, and other matters related to local school building governance; and it is a process that involves a variety of stakeholders in decisions related to the local, individual school" (Herman, 1991, p. vi);
- school improvement: "an ongoing process [that is] linked to an educational philosophy and clearly articulated goals rather than an ad hoc implementation of discrete classroom and school-wide initiatives" (Proudford & Baker, 1994, p. 33).

Delimitations

Delimitations, according to Creswell (1994), refer to those aspects of the study which will narrow the scope of the study. This study included the following delimitations:

1. only those teachers and school administrators in three Edmonton public schools (one elementary; one junior high; one senior high) willing to participate in the study were interviewed;
2. the study examined only the relationship between school-based management and school improvement as perceived by those teachers and school administrators in three Edmonton public schools.

Limitations

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses in a study (Creswell, 1994). Limitations of this study were:

1. the substantial reliance of the study upon the perceptions of the participants as articulated in the interviews;
2. the skill and knowledge of the researcher in conducting the interviews and in analyzing the interview and observation data.

Assumptions

This study was conducted on the basis of the following assumptions:

1. that participants had perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement;
2. that the participants in the study, given assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, were willing to truthfully share these perceptions with the researcher.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and explains the background to the problem. General and subsidiary research questions are listed and the significance of the study for research and practice is discussed. Major terms used throughout the study are defined and limitations, delimitations, and assumptions are stated. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on school-based management and school improvement. Chapter 3 describes the development of school-based management in the Edmonton Public School District, the host board for the study, and gives an overview of the three schools participating in the study. Chapter 4 details the specific research design and methodology used in the study. Chapter 5 discusses the interpretation and analysis of

the study data. The various categories that emerged from that data along with the accompanying themes are also explained in detail. Chapter 6 states the findings of the study in terms of the specific research questions which guided the study. Lastly, Chapter 7 provides a summary of the study, the various conclusions resulting from the study, and a number of implications for research and practice that are worthy of consideration.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Numerous writers (e.g., Bailey, 1991; Brown, 1990; Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Herman & Herman, 1993; Neal, 1991) have praised school-based management as a vehicle of school reform and school improvement. According to David (1989), school-based management is perceived to be a way of bringing about "significant change in educational practice: to empower school staffs to create conditions in schools that facilitate improvement, innovation, and continuous professional growth" (p. 45).

The Beginnings of School-based Management

School-based management has existed in varying degrees for some time. According to Oliver (1992), this tradition of local control of schools dates back to the last century in the United States with separate, individual boards of education for each school building, and was overtaken during this century by centralization, by increasing district size, and by consolidation factors. From after the Second World War and until the late 1960s, school-site decision making was done informally in the school's hallways, or through quick meetings between principal and staff. However, authority in the schools gradually became more centralized, and the union conflicts of the decade impaired collegiality (Herman & Herman, 1993).

During the 1970s, some early school-based management forms began to appear in an attempt to respond to the changing characteristics of desegregated and increasingly multicultural neighborhood and community schools (Taylor & Levine, 1991). Early

indicators of school-based management appeared in New York City in 1971 and in Florida in 1973.

As described by Oliver (1992),

> a school-centered organization of instruction was being promoted based on the following principles: allocation of funds to schools based upon the needs of the children in the schools; development of educational objectives by those associated with the school; determination of curriculum at the school level; and participation of parents in decision making. (p. 48)

These ideas and efforts were encouraged and several other jurisdictions followed suit with their own particular initiatives along school-based management lines (Herman & Herman, 1993). These initiatives and various innovations were adopted to give political power to local communities, to balance state authority, or to achieve an administrative efficiency gain (Wissler & Ortiz, 1986; David, 1989). According to Herman and Herman (1993), all these initiatives preceded the substantial school-based management thrust which occurred during the educational reforms of the 1980s.

Today school-based management can be found throughout the world. The United States, Canada, England, New Zealand, France and Australia are among the many locations where this form of school governance has gained prominence and is being utilized in varying degrees.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The concept of participation in decision making is no stranger to educational contexts. Espoused by writers over the years (e.g., Argyris, 1966; Bridges, 1964; Etzioni, 1964; Hoy & Miskel, 1982), participation in decision making has been widely praised for its

importance in affecting teacher morale and its being positively related to the individual teacher's satisfaction with teaching.

Recent research findings on participation in decision making (e.g., Bennett, 1991; Carlson, 1992; De Leon, 1993; Lee, 1993) have indicated that teachers want to be involved in decision making at the school-site, especially in areas that pertain directly to their daily work--student behavior, planning, curriculum and instruction, and budgeting. School-based management represents one method of involving teachers in the decision-making aspects of school life.

According to Herman (1991), the research on effective schools, Theory Z, Theories X and Y, motivators and hygiene factors, hierarchy of needs, effective principals, and empowerment all form a base for a philosophy of school-based management. Herman (1991, p. v) suggested that when combined, these lead to a pragmatic philosophy that includes the following beliefs and values:

- teachers, principals, and others who work closest to the product (educated and productive students) are in the best position to know and improve education at the building level;
- those who believe all students can learn must be given decision-making authority to implement the delivery system that will produce the desired learnings;
- principals must be instructional leaders and must support the teachers by motivating them and by gathering the resources required;
- school district and local school building policies and rules work best when they support processes and structures like school-based management;

- high expectations for achievement of defined goals and objectives for both students and employees are best stressed at the school level for maximum success;
- people want interesting work, they want to be part of the decision-making group, they want to achieve, they want to assist others to achieve, and they want recognition and a collaborative culture in which to work; these can best be achieved by focusing on the individual school;
- when school employees are provided the authority to make meaningful decisions, they are also accountable for the results of those decisions.

School-based Management Defined

According to Neal (1991),

> school-based management is a research-based, committed, structured, and decentralized method of operating the school district within understood parameters and staff roles to maximize resource effectiveness by transferring the preponderant share of the entire school system's budget, along with corresponding decision-making power. (p. 17)

Amundson (1988) defined school-based management in terms of a process that allowed the individuals responsible for implementing decisions to be involved in making those decisions.

The Edmonton Public School District (1986), a North American pioneer in developing this concept, referred to school-based management as a process in which school-based decisions and actions aimed at achieving specified results at the schools are made by the staff in the schools (p. 42). The Langley School District (1984) in British Columbia also utilized a very straightforward definition of school-based management:

> Decentralized decision-making is an educational process which is designed to allow the most significant decisions and actions aimed at achieving specified results at the schools, to be made at the school. . . . The essence of decentralization is that there is

> a marked shift of decision-making responsibility from central office to the individual school. (p.1)

Having reviewed many definitions of the concept, Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1990) arrived at the following, albeit rather cumbersome, definition:

> School-based management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures, as a form of decentralization that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvements might be stimulated and sustained. Some formal authority to make decisions in the domains of budget, personnel, and program is delegated to and often distributed among site-level actors. Some formal structure (council, committee, team, board) often composed of principals, teachers, parents, and, at times, students and community residents, is created so that site participants can be directly involved in school-wide decision making. (p. 290)

For the purposes of this study, the definition developed by Herman (1991) was used:

> School-based management is a structure and a process that allows greater building level decision making related to some or all the areas of instruction, personnel, budget, policy, and other matters pertinent to local school building governance; and it is a process that involves a variety of stakeholders in decisions related to the local, individual school. (p. vi)

Herman's definition was chosen for this study because it was more precise than the one offered by Malen et al. (1990) and it specifically mentioned the major areas of decision making in school-based management--instruction, personnel, policy, and budget--whereas the definition by the Langley School District (1984), for example, was more general in nature. Also, it mentioned that school-based management was a process, a term which, in the researcher's opinion, when coupled with the major areas of decision making, very accurately describes what school-based management is all about.

School Improvement

Whether referred to as school restructuring, school renewal or school reform, the process of school improvement is implied in each of these concepts. The goal of school improvement, according to Louis, Lagerweij, and Voogt (1994) is to improve the quality of education. Although the operational definition of quality is rather subjective as it is embedded in a society's beliefs about the purposes and relative importance of education, Louis et al. (1994) have suggested that there are nevertheless a number of qualities that serve as the focus of school improvement policies: educational process (learning processes and environments), subject matter content, school climate, staffing, and school organization. All of these qualities are assumed to directly or indirectly increase student achievement (Louis et al., 1994).

Approaches and Emphases

Hopkins, Ainscow, and West (1994) have suggested that there are two senses in which the phrase "school improvement" is commonly used:

> The first is the common-sense meaning which relates to a general effort to make schools better places for pupils and students to learn in. This is a sensible interpretation of the phrase and its most common usage. . . . [The second] refers to school improvement as raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it. It is about strategies for improving the school's capacity for providing quality education in times of change, rather than blindly accepting the edicts of centralized policies, and striving to implement these directives uncritically. (p. 3)

Barth (1990) has distinguished between two different approaches to school improvement that rest on sets of very different assumptions. He referred to the dominant approach as one of "list logic" based on the following assumptions:

- Schools do not have the capacity or will to improve themselves; improvement must therefore come from sources outside of schools, such as universities, state departments of education, and national commissions.
- What needs to be improved about schools is the level of pupil performance and achievement, best measured by standardized tests.
- Schools can be found in which pupils are achieving beyond which might be predicted. By observing teachers and principals in these schools, we can identify their characteristics as 'desirable'.
- Teachers and principals in other schools can be trained to display the desirable traits of their counterparts in high-achieving schools. Then their pupils too will excel.
- School improvement, then, is an attempt to identify what schoolpeople should know and be able to do and to devise ways to get them to know and do it. (p. 38)

This approach, according to Barth (1990), "holds the promise of improving all schools. . . . [However] its only flaw is that it does not seem to work very well" (p. 39). Barth went on to make a case for basing school improvement on the skills, aspirations, and energy of those closest to the school--teachers, principals, parents, and students--whom he refers to as a "community of learners" (p. 43). He further suggested that such a "community of learners" approaches school improvement from a set of assumptions quite different from those mentioned above. These assumptions are:

- Schools have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the schools is to help provide these conditions for those inside.
- When the need and the purpose is there, when the conditions are right, adults and students alike learn and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other.
- What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences.
- School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among themselves. (p. 45)

Joyce (1991), in reviewing various approaches to school improvement, concluded that there were five major emphases to school improvement:

- *Collegiality*: developing cohesive and professional relations within school faculties and connecting them more closely to their surrounding neighborhoods;

- *Research*: helping school faculties study research findings about effective school practices or instructional alternatives;
- *Site-specific information*: helping faculties collect and analyze data about their schools and their students' progress;
- *Curriculum initiatives*: introducing changes within subject areas or, as in the case of the computer, across the curriculum areas;
- *Instructional* strategies: organizing teachers to study teaching skills and strategies. (p. 59)

Reynolds (1993) elaborated on what he considered to be the major emphases in school improvement:

> It must deal with the culture of schools, as well as with their structure. It must concern itself with the informal world of the school, as well as the formal world. It must concern itself with the deep structure of values, relationships, and internal processes, as well as with the world of behavior. It must ensure that it takes account of the need to manage the interaction between the body of improvement knowledge and the collective psyche of the school. (p. 25)

Glickman (1993) emphasized the importance of democratic decision making in the school improvement process:

- A public school, in fulfilling its highest purpose, should be democratic in decisions about the core work of schoolwide teaching and learning.
- There are other areas of decision making--within a school, between the school and the district, and between the school and its local community--that must be negotiated in terms of control, responsibility, and consequences. The authoritarian and advisory approach, the input-and-selection approach, or the collaborative approach may be an appropriate approach for decision making outside the core.
- Schools and individuals vary in their developmental readiness for fully collaborative, democratic work. (pp. 84-85)

School Improvement Defined

Van Velzen, Miles, Ekholm, Hameyer, and Robin (1985) defined school improvement as "a systematic, sustained effort aimed at changing the learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively" (p. 48).

For the purposes of this study, the following definition of school improvement as posited by Proudford and Baker (1994) was used: "an ongoing process linked to an educational philosophy and clearly articulated goals rather than an *ad hoc* implementation of discrete classroom and school-wide initiatives" (p. 33). They also stated that there are three broad dimensions to this process: "namely, the approach to curriculum, the dynamics of school improvement, and the outcomes of school improvement" (p. 22). The researcher settled on this definition because it, too, emphasized the process nature of the concept and it emphasized both the planning aspect of the concept and the importance of its being connected to the philosophy and goals of the school.

Evident throughout both of these definitions are the concepts of planning and integration characterized by the long term nature of the process. Such planning involves the various stakeholders in the decision making related to school improvement. Integration refers to the process of school improvement being designed in such a way as to fit into the overall goals and objectives of the school. Also of importance is the long term aspect of the school improvement process. It is not a "quick fix" solution and neither is it an "ad hoc" procedure.

Criteria for Success

The literature is quite clear on what constitutes successful school improvement. Renihan and Renihan (1994) listed several characteristics which they identified as common to successful school improvement initiatives. These include:

- these projects are initiated predominantly by school-level professionals;
- they are based on an 'open system' philosophy (they involve key publics);
- they do not use 'canned approaches' meaning that they are tailored to accommodate local circumstances;
- they are not politically motivated;

- they procure a very high level of commitment from all parties involved;
- they give attention to both the pastoral and cosmetic aspects of schooling, that is, by going beyond mere appearance of the physical aspects of the school, they highlight relationships among people within the school;
- they use externals moderately (experts are on 'tap', not on 'top');
- they are based on continuous and sustained professional development;
- they are continually monitored for progress;
- they build upon a collaborative model of decision making. (p.85)

The importance of having school improvement initiatives integrated into the overall school mission affected the longevity of such initiatives. Louis et al. (1994) concluded from their research that improvement programs closely tied to core educational activities--that is, curriculum and instructional practice, or reorganizing to improve learning environments--were more likely to be retained than changes not tied to instructional goals. Firestone and Corbett (1988) found that improvements perceived to provide significant advantages over past practice were also more likely to continue over longer periods of time.

According to Posch (cited in Louis et al., 1994, p. 5242), research has also supported an emphasis on "fit" between current school practices and beliefs and the innovation. Posch concluded that improvement programs, by definition, must be different from past practice if they were to create change. They must also be consistent with underlying values and must be interpretable if they were to have an impact.

It is acknowledged that not all schools are alike and that there are several critical variables worthy of consideration in the improvement process (Louis et al., 1994). One such variable was the organizational pressure from top administrators for substantial change which, according to Huberman and Miles (1984), was a major determinant of

whether or not the improvement initiative occurred. Also, schools that had strong team and school leadership and a capacity for change management were also more likely to succeed in development and implementation of improvement initiatives (Louis et al., 1994). Organizations with cultures that supported risk-taking were also more likely to promote individual and group improvement programs (Louis & Miles, 1990).

Lezotte and Jacoby (1990) considered the following features to be critical to successful school improvement:

- the process focuses on increased student achievement as the primary target of improvement efforts;
- the process pays explicit attention to issues of quality and equity and judges success on the basis of whether or not *all* students benefit from the change strategies that are to be implemented;
- the process is collaborative in form, and requires broad input from faculty, staff and administration, since all are an integral part of the change process;
- the planning process is supported by research and is consistent with a large body of case literature that validates the process;
- the process recognizes that school improvement is ongoing and self-renewing. (p. 5)

The Role of Decentralization

During the 1970s and the 1980s there was a major shift in the style and form of educational change efforts, from the large-scale centralized attempts at educational reform in the 1960s and early 1970s to an emphasis on school-focused strategies (Louis et al., 1994). Lane and Epps (1992) suggested that as we move toward the twenty-first century there is "the belief that local schools are the authentic unit of improvement" (p. xi) and that "educators, lawmakers, and an increasing number of the general public are convinced that schools will improve only when we decentralize" (p. xi). Clark and Astuto (1994) poignantly echoed similar sentiments:

> No one can reform our schools for us. If there is to be authentic reform in education, it must a grassroots movement. Systemic reformers will have to be resisted

> systematically, for they are distracting us from doing the job at hand. The only system we have is the local community school, and external agencies should be worrying about how they can help and support these school units--not about how they can dominate them. The current repressive and retrogressive policies will have to be rejected and replaced by teacher-and-student-centered reforms. We are honestly sorry that those who would save our children and our schools by fiat cannot do so. But that is the simple truth. We will have to do it in individual communities, through hard work and the investment and effort of individuals who work on the front line. Isn't that always the way? (p. 520)

Various researchers have suggested that there is considerable support for decentralizing educational decision making from the district level to the school level (e.g., Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Chubb & Moe, 1988; Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984; Sykes & Elmore, 1989; Timar & Kirp, 1987). These arguments for decentralization, according to Lange (1991), were focused in several areas: improved school performance, more effective and efficient management of resources, goal setting, and involvement of school staff members in renewal and change.

Challenges

Those involved in improving and reforming schools have discussed the need for deeper, second-order changes in the structures and cultures of schools, rather than superficial first-order changes (Fullan & Miles, 1992). In spite of these demands for improvement, whether initiated at the school level or imposed from above, actual improvements were limited because, as Louis et al. (1994) have stated, most schools lacked the ideas or the internal resources to grapple with the basic challenges being posed. Louis et al. (1994) further proposed that it was useful to examine some of the structural conditions which ensure that most schools lack the basic resources to engage in systematic improvement efforts:

Most schools rarely have a schedule that permits teachers to meet and work together

> for sustained periods of time. School budgets have been under increasing pressure in most countries since at least the early 1980s while, at the same time, teachers' work has become more demanding as an increasing number of students arrive at school less well-socialized, less prepared to deal with the material, and more frequently from family settings that are not supportive. The teaching force, in many countries, is aging and often demoralized due to declining resources. Teachers in virtually every country complain about the increasing levels of bureaucratization, and the rapid and frequent demands for change that come from central authorities--even those countries that have policies to promote devolution or decentralization. (p. 5245)

According to Renihan and Renihan (1989), typical school improvement thrusts were characterized in their early life-cycle by a period of high motivation, optimism and a feeling of accomplishment. They note that "this stage is one in which commitment, productivity and involvement are carried along at a high level on a spirit of novelty and an aura of change" (p. 367). The challenge is for key players to maintain this enthusiasm and commitment in continuing school improvement efforts over the long term.

To retain this enthusiasm and commitment, Renihan and Renihan (1989) commented that "the strategies having the most impact on the longevity of the project are those which *institutionalize* the school improvement effort, embedding it in the fabric of the school and its operation" (p. 371). To accomplish this "institutionalization", they recommended the following:

- the provision of system-level support in the form of a school system philosophy of school improvement, clearly articulated and known throughout the school system;
- the reinforcement of school improvement through the activities and decisions of school administrators and elected officials;
- the deliberate and active solicitation of involvement of key publics, planned and structured to ensure sustained participation in activities;
- the establishment of clear monitoring procedures (through a committee including representatives of teacher, student and parent groups, and involving at least one external person), structured to periodically review progress and report to staff;
- the provision of deliberately scheduled times at regular intervals during the year, at staff meetings, board meetings, principals' meetings, etc. to provide for discussion of school improvement and school progress;

- the provision of school improvement--related staff development, and the provision of specific 'refresher sessions' to review school effectiveness literature, discuss ideas in the research and to keep the central messages of school effectiveness in the forefront of the thinking of the school. (p. 372)

School-based Management and School Improvement

There is a preponderance of literature on school-based management. However, it appears that there are two schools of thought prevalent among the writings. One school views school-based management as a very positive and successful vehicle of school improvement and school reform. The other argues that the concept has been minimally successful and that all the time, energy, and effort expended in operationalizing school-based management does not justify the results. In the following text the researcher will consider the literature from these two perspectives.

Herman (1991, p. viii) has suggested that school-based management should result in the following:

- the productivity of the students and employees should increase;
- the organizational climate should improve;
- community support should increase;
- the organization should be results-oriented rather than means-oriented;
- the culture should be one of contentment, efficiency, and effectiveness; and the planning and standard operating procedures should be in place to continue and further enhance this culture;
- strategic and operational planning are considered crucial, and there is constant monitoring, evaluation, and feedback to each planning group, whether they deal with strategic or operational plans.

Although Herman was rather prolific in suggesting all these positives regarding the utilization of school-based management, he did not support these claims with empirical evidence.

Neal (1991) also implied a very positive attitude towards school-based management. However, he was more balanced in his overall appraisal of the concept, citing both advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages, he suggested the following (pp. 34-43):

- greater commitment by staff to decisions;
- greater support for how funds are spent;
- increased professional growth;
- improvement in morale;
- more effective spending of limited funds;
- more leadership opportunity is provided for principals;
- the school becomes more responsive to the community;
- teachers are empowered for enhanced student learning;
- educational concerns take highest priority.

In discussing whether or not school-based management affected student learning, Neal (1991) cited a 1987 study conducted by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) which reviewed 49 studies. The findings of these studies confirmed that parental involvement had a positive influence on student achievement. Although these findings did not focus specifically on school-based management, these results were indeed encouraging as parental involvement is usually a dominant feature of schools operating under school-based management practices. The other positives listed above were primarily Neal's

personal thoughts on school-based management. He did not offer any empirical evidence to support those claims.

Caldwell and Spinks (1988) considered school-based management (or collaborative school management as they call it) in terms of benefits for a number of different groups: students; those involved in the policy group; the principal and other educational leaders; and teachers. These benefits included the following (pp. 50-56):

- for students--the opportunity to be involved in the policymaking process especially through structures such as school councils, as well as in planning for programmes in which students have a special interest or expertise;
- for those involved in the policy group--the focus of the process is on the primary purpose for the school's existence, namely, learning and teaching;
- for the principal and other educational leaders--school-based management provides a framework wherein the higher-order functions of leadership can be exercised, namely, working with and through others to build the enduring school culture which is critically important if excellence in schooling is to be attained;
- for teachers--gives them a role in management which focuses on the primary reason for their employment, namely, the education of children; this approach ensures that all teachers have the opportunity to contribute according to their expertise and stake in the outcomes of the decision-making process.

Brown (1990), in his study on decentralization and school-based management, concluded that

> while outright savings were not apparent, both cost reductions and cost increases were evident. Student access to educational resources may be enhanced. Personnel were able to pursue some general activities (such as professional development) and take

> many specific actions which they believed to be linked directly or indirectly to student learning. As managers, principals felt they were educational leaders. With regard to output indicators, data on learning outcomes were lacking but results based on satisfaction of students and parents were positively associated with school-based management. (p. 199)

Levin (cited in White, 1991) suggested that

> school-based management is related to student learning and achievement. However, the direct relationship is not clear. It is difficult to draw a cause and effect relationship between school-based management and student achievement since any impact of school-based management is complicated by other trends at the school site, or at the local, state, and national level. (p. 4)

White (1991) concluded that increased authority at the school-site may improve self-esteem, morale, and efficiency of school personnel. She perceived school-based management as opening up communication between parents, teachers, and students, and improving educational services by giving them a larger voice in educational decisions.

David (1989), in her review of the research on school-based management, posited that

> in districts that practice school-based management essentials, research studies find a range of positive effects, from increased teacher satisfaction and professionalism to new arrangements and practices within schools. These findings apply to districts with decentralized systems whether or not they carry the 'school-based management' label. (p. 51)

Similar optimism was expressed by Levine and Eubanks (1992) in their appraisal of the positive features of school-based management:

> Recent emphasis on site-based management as a tool for reform is positive in that such management recognizes and incorporates some of the major conclusions and generalizations derived from two decades of research on efforts to change and improve public schools. In addition, the recent emphasis on empowerment theoretically may help in addressing severe obstacles and pitfalls that have hampered earlier reform efforts. (p. 62)

The importance of improvement and reform at the building level is also emphasized.

School-based management recognizes that positive change cannot be simply mandated from the outside but is a school-by-school phenomenon (Fullan, 1991; Marburger, 1985).

Other commonly mentioned advantages of school-based management included: better programs for students, full use of human resources, higher quality decisions, increased staff loyalty and commitment, development of staff leadership skills, clear organizational goals, improved communication, improved staff morale, support for creativity and innovation, greater public confidence, enhanced fiscal accountability and restructuring (Prasch, 1990). Other studies (e.g., Allen, 1993; Cuendet, 1993; Dondero, 1993; Hatchell, 1990; Littlefield, 1992; Oliver, 1992; Skaruppa, 1994) reported several positive findings ranging from increased teacher morale to perceived increases in student learning and achievement.

Despite years of experimentation, many researchers agree that the potential of school-based management is largely unrealized and many questions about its merits remain unanswered. School-based management has been called a catalyst that has created new decision-making processes, bolstered teachers' morale, and provided teachers and school staff with more opportunities to assume leadership (Carlos & Amsler, 1993).

Not all writers were as positive in their assessments of the benefits of school-based management. Levin (1992) questioned whether or not it was worth the effort:

> The evidence does not suggest school-based management . . . will always, or even often, result in significant changes in educational goals or practices. . . . Given the relatively small changes which appear to result from current school-based management efforts, one question which occurs is whether the change to school-based management ought to be a high priority. Might we be better served by investing the same time and energy in say, efforts to improving instruction or efforts to increase the involvement of parents? (p. 31)

In their review of the literature on school-based management, Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1990) stated quite emphatically that there was little evidence to suggest that school-based management produced substantial or sustained improvements in either the attitudes of administrators and teachers or the instructional component of schools. In their discussion of the concept and its relationship to the effective schools movement, they stated that

> project descriptions/status reports do allude to activities that might indirectly affect expectations for student achievement, the orderly climate of schools and the involvement of parents in schools. Site participants, for example, redesign report cards, attend workshops, revise discipline policies, publish parent newsletters, and include parents on their school improvement councils or their school planning committees. But evidence regarding the actual effect of these activities is rarely contained in project descriptions/status reports. Moreover, as previously noted, systematic investigations suggest these actions have, at best, a marginal effect on the emphasis of the instructional program or the ability of parents to be involved in, or more precisely to exert influence on school policies and practices. (p. 322)

Malen et al. (1990) are as equally skeptical in their treatment of the relationship between school-based management and the academic achievement of students:

> Once again, there is little evidence that school-based management improves student achievement. Several position papers . . . and project descriptions/status reports claim that school-based management produced improved scores on achievement tests. . . . But the requirements for establishing causal claims are not met in these documents. . . . They do not establish that gains in achievement followed the move to school-based management. (p. 323)

Proponents have suggested that this form of school governance will improve employee morale and motivation. Malen et al. (1990) do concede that school-based management

> appears to have an initial, positive impact on the morale/motivation of some participants. [However] a variety of factors restrict the ability of school-based management to produce a substantial or sustained improvement in morale/motivation of a significant number of participants. (p. 311)

The question of whether or not it improves school climate and classroom instruction is also addressed by Malen et al. (1990). According to these authors, the evidence does not exist to confirm such claims (p. 317).

In a study exploring the relationship of school-based management, shared decision making, and school improvement, Allen (1993) concluded that there seemed to be little relationship between school-based management, shared decision making and school improvement. Schools in that study made greatest improvement in planning and staff development and least improvement in curriculum and instruction.

Cuendet (1993) found that with the implementation of school-based management, there were more positive outcomes for teachers and staff, with students receiving the least number of positive outcomes. A conclusion of the study was that school-based management was not highly successful in increasing academic achievement. Similarly, Lopez (1993), in a study of school-based management in Texas school districts, concluded that there was no evidence from data to support the premise that school-based management had improved student achievement.

Allen (1991) examined the resulting changes brought about by school-based management as perceived by elementary school principals, teachers and support personnel. She found principals perceived that interaction and communication had improved and that there was greater collaboration. Teachers, however, perceived the results to be little change in decision-making power, a larger number of extra job functions without compensation, and time taken away from the classroom. Support personnel's perceptions included a greater involvement in the decision-making process and increased professionalism and authority.

Skaruppa (1994) studied one school's experience with school-based management. He concluded that no major differences in student achievement, attendance, and suspension rates resulted from the implementation of school-based management.

In a balanced discussion on the pros and cons of school-based management, Neal (1991, pp. 45-49) suggested the following disadvantages:

- the preparation required for a school or district to convert to school-based management requires significant planning time and effort;
- extra financial assistance is necessary for an advisory group to finalize a recommendation as to whether or not school-based management should be adopted;
- extra time on the part of everybody--teachers, administrators and parents--is required initially;
- the transition to school-based management will undoubtedly involve controversy;
- labor relations may become a problem;
- organizational inefficiency could result;
- there is no guarantee that things will get better.

An evaluation of the School-based Management/Shared Decision Making Program in the Dade County Public School District by Collins and Hanson (cited in Mohrman & Wohlstetter, 1994) reported that project schools fared no better than non-project schools on school report cards, staff attendance was no better, and student performance on standardized achievement tests did not change during the project.

Prasch (1990) noted that, despite the current popularity of school-based management, there were several disadvantages: more work, less efficiency, diluted benefits of specialization, uneven school performance, greater need for staff development, possible

confusion about new roles and responsibilities, coordination difficulties, unintended consequences, and irreversible shifts. He also listed several barriers to implementation: resistance to change, unstable school leadership, budget increases, existing government structures, misinterpretation of control, "quick-fix" attitudes, and inappropriate staffing.

Having carried out an intensive study of two school-based management projects, Mauriel and Lindquist (1989) reported the following conclusions:

> The conflicts over delegation and advocacy, the need for training, the requirements for time and resources, and the fact that many site councils began to falter after early bursts of enthusiasm, point up the size and scope of the problems involved. . . . For many school systems the adoption of school-based management means a major change in organizational structure, management style, allocation of power and resources, a need for new accountability systems, and a serious renegotiation of the respective governance roles and authority of the school board, the teacher union, the central office, and the community stakeholders. Otherwise, school-based management will be just another moderately helpful public relations, communications vehicle tinkering with the peripheral issues of school governance and management. (p. 22)

In their assessment of school-based management in 31 districts, Clune and White (1988) concluded that there were several concerns worthy of note:

> Criteria of success for school-based management programs generally have pertained to process rather than outcomes (increased autonomy, flexibility, communication). Systematic monitoring is rare, whether of student achievement or of other outcomes. Implementation problems revolve around the difficulty of new roles. . . . Principals may lack the disposition and training. . . . Teachers may lack time and resources. . . . Participation of parents and students is often difficult to maintain. . . . The most conspicuous outstanding research issue flows out of the findings of program diversity and the typical lack of systematic evaluation. . . . Given a very large range of decentralization, and practically uniform expressions of satisfaction, the obvious question is whether type and degree of decentralization make any difference. (pp. 23-31)

Having had the opportunity to observe teachers and school administrators operating in a school-based management/school improvement relationship in three schools over a three month period, the researcher must agree with the school of thought which views school-

based management in a very positive light. That is not to say that the critics of school-based management should be dismissed outright. There are indeed imperfections in the concept that need to be addressed. It is important to realize that school-based management offers considerable potential for school improvement.

Potential for School Improvement

Although the literature on school-based management and school improvement appears to be conflicting and inconclusive, there is considerable optimism regarding the potential of school-based management. David (1989) exemplified that optimism:

> Once school-based management is understood in the context of empowering school staff to improve educational practice through fundamental change in district management functions, the relevant research topics are easy to identify. They include school improvement programs, organizational change, efforts to stimulate innovation, participatory decision making, and effective practices in many areas, from teacher selection to staff development. (p. 46)

Levine and Eubanks (1992) echoed similar sentiments:

> Site-based management represents a theoretically promising and attractive approach to local school reform, particularly when it aims to release or relieve schools from unproductive or debilitating external constraints, emphasizes reconstitution of staff so as to develop and enhance a common faculty mission, and involves substantial district or project-level interventions designed to support systematic and comprehensive efforts to improve instruction. (p. 73)

School-based management is not a panacea for all the educational ills facing today's schools. "That school-based management is no 'quick fix' is evidenced by the fact that it took 10 years to accomplish in Dade County. . . . It takes at least five years for tangible results to be achieved" (Shelton, 1992, p. 2). In a similar vein, Brown (1990) acknowledged that although the concept had "some attendant problems [there were] also possibilities for the improvement of schools" (p. 9).

Levin (1992) expressed optimism, albeit cautious, regarding the potential of

school-based management:

> It does appear from available evidence that school-based management holds some promise of productive change. Whether the promise is commensurate with the energy required to implement the change is an open question. Alternative versions of school-based management, which move to a greater degree of authority and involves changes in governance, may have more potential to produce educational change. (p. 31)

Odden, in a foreword to Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994), offered rather sobering, but somewhat similar thoughts on its potential:

> School-based management should be conceived as a part of an overall systemic education reform, not as a reform in and of itself, and that decentralized decision making provides the conditions that allow for school-site teachers and administrators to design changes in school organization and curriculum that ultimately will improve student achievement. For those outcomes to occur [we need to] emphasize the importance of clear education goals that focus on student performance. Without such clarity about the purposes of schools, and without good measures of student outcomes, it will be difficult for even a well-designed decentralization strategy to improve school improvement. (pp. xii-xiii)

A considerable degree of unanimity exists among many of the writers that empirical evidence is lacking on the relationship between school-based management and school improvement (e.g., Allen, 1991; Alln, 1993; Barnes, 1990; David, 1989; Elliott, 1992; Lopez, 1993; Shelton, 1992; White, 1991). It is anticipated that this study will help to fill this present gap in the research literature. The methods utilized in accomplishing this objective will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework

Having examined the literature on school-based management and school improvement, it is now possible for the researcher to present a conceptual framework for the study. According to Rudestam and Newton (1992), "adopting a conceptual framework allows the researcher to bound the study with regard to who and what will and will not be studied" (p. 37).

Miles and Huberman (1994) further elaborated on the role of the conceptual framework:

> A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied--the key factors, constructs or variables--and the presumed relationships among them. Frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive or causal. (p. 18)

In the actual development of the conceptual framework, Miles and Huberman (1994) have advocated the use of "bins" [which] come from theory and experience and (often) from the general objectives of the study envisioned" (p. 18). They have suggested that setting out these "bins", naming them, and getting clearer about their relationships will lead the researcher to a conceptual framework. Miles and Huberman further commented on the value of using this approach:

> Doing that exercise also forces you to be selective--to decide which variables are most important, which relationships are likely to be the most meaningful, and, as a consequence, what information should be collected and analyzed--at least from the outset. (p. 18)

This study examined teachers' and school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. The literature on school-based management is divided as to whether or not it results in school improvement. However, this researcher is of the opinion that the literature in support of

school-based management positively influencing the process of school improvement makes a much more convincing argument in that regard than the literature which questions the efficacy of the school-based management concept. The following reasons have helped the researcher arrive at this conclusion:

- the theoretical underpinnings of school-based management involve the concept of teacher participation in decision making which has been well researched over the years and has been found to positively influence the teaching situation (e.g., Argyris, 1966; Carlson, 1992; Hoy & Miskel, 1982; Lee, 1993);
- the notion of decisions being made by those who are intimately involved with their implementation and who are closest to their level of implementation form a very real part of the concept of school-based management and appears to the researcher to be an appropriate, commonsensical way of doing things in organizations such as schools;
- the current preponderance of literature discussing the value of school-based management suggests to the researcher that there are many positive characteristics of the concept which appear to have considerable potential in the school improvement arena and which are worthy of further consideration and examination;
- the perceived success of school-based management in several jurisdictions throughout North America, especially that of the Edmonton Public School District, further suggests to the researcher that the concept is a worthwhile one.

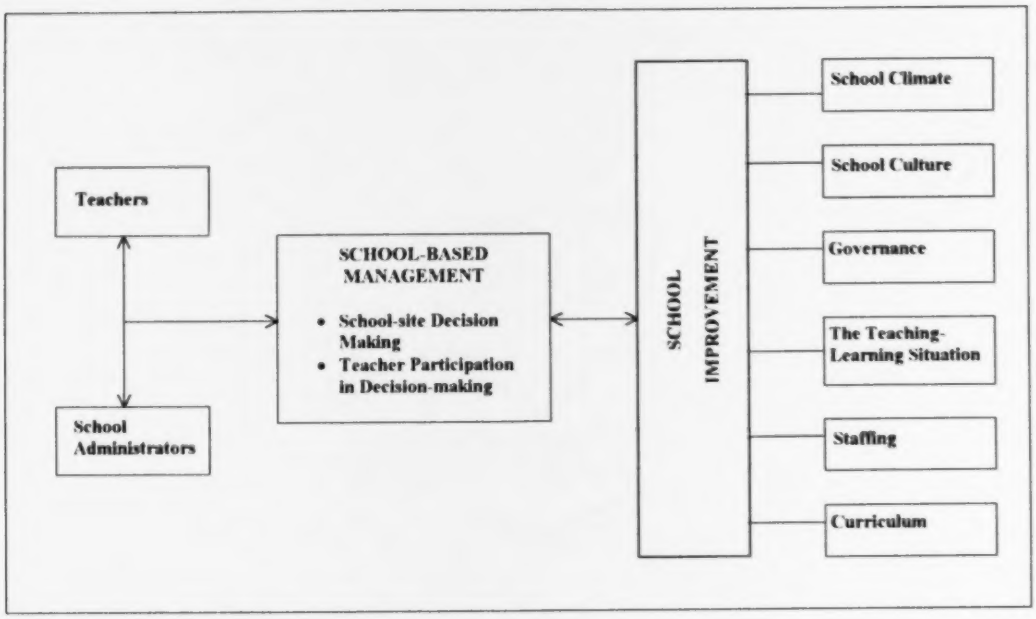
However, the other school of thought prevalent in the literature is that school-based management has accomplished little with respect to school improvement especially as it relates to academic achievement. The researcher contends that those who have looked at school improvement in terms of academic achievement only are rather myopic and need to

re-focus their thoughts on school improvement as being a holistic process with academic achievement being only one aspect of school improvement. School improvement involves school climate, school culture, governance, the teaching-learning situation in the classroom, staffing, and curriculum. School-based management has the potential to affect all of these facets of schools and to isolate school-based management in terms of its influence on academic achievement only, this researcher suggests, is to do a disservice to the school-based management concept.

This study is designed to examine how teachers and school administrators perceive the relationship between school-based management and school improvement and whether or not they perceive school-based management to result in school improvement. The researcher posits that school-based management has a positive influence on school improvement and that those working in schools operating under a school-based management model perceive the concept to result in school improvement. This is the conceptual framework for the study and is presented schematically in Figure 2.1:

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Framework



Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the relevant literature focusing on school-based management and its potential for school improvement. The value of having a conceptual framework in conducting a study was also discussed and a framework for this study was presented. Although there are many obstacles and hurdles to be overcome in "institutionalizing" school-based management, there is considerable agreement among educators that the concept does represent a viable and realistic mechanism capable of bringing about school improvement.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design, data collection and data analysis procedures utilized in the study. Concerns with the trustworthiness of the data are discussed along with a description of the specific measures taken to address those concerns. The ethical considerations of the study, together with the specific strategies adopted to address those considerations, are also detailed.

Research Design

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) a research design refers to "the researcher's plan of how to proceed" (p. 58). Yin (1994) stated that

> every type of empirical research has an implicit, if not explicit, research design. In the most elementary sense, the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions. Colloquially, a research design is *an action plan for getting from here to there*, where *here* may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and *there* is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between 'here' and 'there' may be found a number of major steps, including the collection and analysis of relevant data. (p. 19)

Selecting a research design is determined by the particular subject being investigated, by the questions that it raises, and by the type of end product that is desired. The case study approach is one way of conducting educational research. Yin (1994) has suggested that the case study approach is the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.

Case Study Approach

In recent years qualitative research has been gaining widespread acceptance as a legitimate form of inquiry. As Denzim and Lincoln (1994) have written, "the extent to which the qualitative revolution has overtaken the social sciences and related professional fields has been nothing short of amazing" (p. ix). Discussions of case studies are "embedded in the growing body of literature on qualitative research" (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). Merriam has suggested that this is so because "the logic of this type of research derives from the worldview of qualitative research which has, as its paramount objective, to understand the *meaning* of an experience" (p. 16).

According to Merriam (1988), qualitative research

> assumes that there are multiple realities--that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than ends. In this paradigm there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the end product. (p. 17)

Although there are various kinds of case studies, Merriam (1988) has stated that they all share the following characteristics: they are particularistic in that they focus on a specific situation or phenomenon; they are descriptive meaning that the end product is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon; they are heuristic--that is they offer insights into the phenomenon under study; and they are inductive--focusing on process, understanding, and interpretation--rather than deductive and experimental (p. 21).

There are several different types of research design available to the researcher. The question of when to use a qualitative case study for research purposes as opposed to some other type of design really depends on what the investigator wants to know. How the

problem is defined and the questions it raises determine the study's design (Merriam, 1988). Bromley (1986) also emphasized the utility of the case study method:

> [Case studies] get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires), whereas experiments and surveys often use convenient derivative data, e.g., test results, official records. Also, case studies tend to spread the net for evidence widely, whereas experiments and surveys usually have a narrow focus. (p. 23)

Since the main purpose of this study was to examine teachers' and school administrators' perceptions with respect to the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, it was decided that a case study approach would be desirable. It would allow the researcher to spend a considerable period of time in schools talking to teachers and school administrators about this particular relationship and actually observing the day to day activities going on in the school.

Site Selection and Access

In September of 1994 the researcher was given formal approval by the Edmonton Public School District to contact the principals of three specific schools (an elementary school, a junior high school and a senior high school) within its jurisdiction to ascertain whether or not they would be interested in participating in the study.

The researcher was interested in having schools participate in the study that had a positive reputation in the community with respect to their school leadership. This was the criterion that was suggested to the Edmonton Public School District and it was this criterion that formed the basis for the school selection.

A letter was written to each principal with a brief summary of the study and was followed up approximately one week later by a phone call. As a result of these phone calls, individual meetings were set up with the principals.

The meetings involved discussing with each principal the researcher's proposed study, the method of conducting the study, and the timeline for tentative visits to the schools. The meetings ended with all three principals agreeing to take the proposal to their respective staffs and they each requested the researcher to contact them within two to three weeks for a response.

The response from two of the three schools was positive. One school decided not to be involved in the study. The researcher then contacted the Edmonton Public School District and was given another school to approach. This school agreed to be part of the study. The next step for the researcher was to schedule visits to each of the schools. A schedule of those visits is included in Appendix A. Each site visit consisted of four weeks and involved the researcher, as one principal aptly described it, "living with us" for that period of time. The researcher went into each school at approximately 8:00 am and remained there until approximately 3:30 pm. On certain days, the researcher was there until four or five o'clock because of staff meetings, interview sessions with individual teachers, and other meetings as they arose.

Because of the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher felt it necessary to spend at least four weeks in each school in order to build up a substantial rapport with teachers and administrators, further adding to the credibility of the study. This "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302) was seen by the researcher as essential to

the purposes of the study and would hopefully reduce the amount of "impression management" that the researcher would be subjected to.

During the initial days of each site visit the researcher made significant efforts to meet all members of the staff (academic and non-academic) and to become familiar with the daily operating procedures in each school. Those efforts also involved becoming familiar with the physical plant, talking informally to students and staff, and just general rapport-building. This familiarization period, which on an average took about 7 - 10 days in each school, gave the researcher time to decide on possible subjects for the interviews.

Data Collection

Qualitative methods, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 199), consider the human as the instrument of inquiry and include normal human activities such as looking, listening, speaking, and reading. Interviewing, observing, watching for the tacit as well as the obvious, and interpreting are all legitimate qualitative modes of inquiry The researcher is the key instrument in data gathering while the natural setting is the direct source of data. The data in this study were obtained using two sources: (1) interviews of teachers and school administrators; and (2) researcher observations of activities going on in each of the three schools over a four week period.

Yin (1994) considered the interview as "one of the most important sources of case study information" (p. 84). He further emphasized this importance:

> Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. They can also provide shortcuts to the prior history of the situation, helping you to identify other relevant sources of evidence. (p. 85)

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described an interview as "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people . . . that is directed by one in order to get information" (p. 96). In other words, the purpose of an interview is to gather descriptive data regarding a specific issue or research problem.

The literature on qualitative research describes various types of interviews ranging from the structured to the unstructured (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). This study utilized what Patton (1990) has referred to as a "standardized open-ended interview [which] consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (p. 280). A total of 23 interviews from the three schools (6 from Lincoln Elementary; 7 from Valleyview Junior High; and 10 from Jordan High) was conducted during the researcher's three month stay in the schools. A copy of the interview schedule is attached as Appendix B. Purposive or purposeful sampling was used to select subjects to be interviewed. Purposive sampling, as Merriam (1988) has explained, is "based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight and therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (p. 48). The two weeks out of the total four weeks the researcher spent in each school prior to conducting any interviews greatly facilitated this selection process. It provided the appropriate time to get to know school personnel and to make decisions as to which individuals the researcher should approach to see if they were interested in participating in the study. All individuals approached did agree to participate.

The second method of data collection involved direct observation by the researcher.

Merriam (1988) has suggested that "in the real world of collecting data, informal interviews and conversations are often interwoven with observation" (p. 87). She endorsed several advantages of this technique:

> Observation makes it possible to record behavior as it is happening. There are topics people may not feel free to talk about or may not want to discuss. In studying a small educational unit, for example, the researcher might observe dissension and strife among certain staff members that an interview would not reveal. Observation is the best technique to use when an activity, event, or situation can be observed firsthand, when a fresh perspective is desired, or when participants are not able to discuss the topic under study. (p. 89)

The four weeks in each school allowed the researcher sufficient time to observe the various student, teacher, parent, support staff and school administrator activities going on in the school. The researcher kept notes in a daily journal which were later used in the data analysis process. Each of the interviews was audiotaped, transcribed and returned to interviewees for verification.

Pilot Study

A pilot study involving six teachers was conducted by the researcher in the spring and summer of 1994. These six teachers were full-time graduate students at the University of Alberta during the 1993-1994 academic year who, in their year of teaching prior to returning to full-time university study, had all worked in schools operated according to school-based management principles.

The purpose of this pilot study was to assist the researcher in eliminating any "bugs" in the proposed study and to allow the researcher to gain valuable experience with respect to the interviewing and data analysis procedures. Those researcher objectives were accomplished. As a condition of the pilot study agreed to by both the participants and the

researcher, the results of that study have not been included with the results of this larger study.

Data Analysis

According to Patton (1990), "the challenge [of qualitative inquiry] is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed" (p. 372). Although he emphasized that "there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study", Patton cautioned that "this does not mean that there are no guidelines to assist in analyzing data" (p. 372). Indeed the literature on qualitative inquiry abounds with suggestions to assist the neophyte researcher. It is acknowledged that although data analysis procedures will vary from one study to another, ". . . analysts have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible (p. 372).

Throughout this study, data analysis occurred at several different times. Phase one of the analysis took place during the collection of the data, for as Merriam (1988) has stated, "simultaneous analysis and data collection allows the researcher to direct the data collection phase more productively, as well as develop a data base that is both relevant and parsimonious" (p. 145).

Phase two of the analysis, which took place after all the data had been collected, involved organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data. In conducting this phase, the

researcher relied on several analytical strategies as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Patton (1990).

The actual organization of the data was the first step. Interview transcripts and field notes were placed in a large three ring binder. All pages were numbered consecutively, specific codes were assigned for each school site and two sets of photocopied duplicates were made for further use in the data analysis process.

The next step was for the researcher to read each set of school data and during this reading, comments, observations, notes, and questions were written down. This accumulation of notes helped to isolate what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as "units of information" (p. 345). Then each of these units was coded according to the school from which the data were collected, the source of the data be it interview or observation, and lastly the page number on which the information could be located in the three ring binder. Each unit was assigned a label consisting of a word or phrase that described the data as closely as possible.

Following this unitizing and coding, the duplicate copies of the data were then cut up in order to separate each unit of information. Next, these separated units of information were sorted into categories using a sorting strategy suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This process involved the following steps:

1. Taking one of the units, reading it, and noting its content. This first unit became the first entry in the first category. It was then placed in a file folder for later use.
2. Picking out a second unit of information. After reading it and deciding whether or not it was similar to the first unit, it was then placed with that first unit in the file folder or

if it was not, it was set aside to become the first entry in the second category to be placed in another file folder.

3. This process continued until all the units of information had been looked at and assigned a category. Units not fitting any of the categories were set aside under the "miscellaneous" category.

The researcher now had several file folders labeled as category # 1, # 2 and so on. These numbers were then replaced by names which attempted, as closely as possible, to describe the essence of what the items were all about.

Although the above process was a tedious and time-consuming one, it did facilitate the researcher's efforts in being able, as a result of the continual reading and re-reading of the data, to identify various themes and patterns running throughout the data.

Trustworthiness

A basic challenge facing all researchers is the need to ensure that any data collected or any interpretations made during an inquiry are trustworthy. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) emphasized the importance of this trustworthiness:

> If intellectual inquiry is to have an impact on human knowledge, either by adding to an overall body of knowledge or by solving a particular problem, it must guarantee some measure of credibility about what it has inquired, must communicate in a manner that will enable application by its intended audience, and must enable its audience to check on its findings and the inquiry process by which the findings were obtained. (p. 28)

In this study, the trustworthiness of the data and the interpretations of those data are addressed by attention to the four criteria of trustworthiness suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and confirmability (neutrality) (pp. 289-331).

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the extent to which findings and interpretations are seen as credible by those who were the sources of the data (p. 296). To ensure credibility, Lincoln and Guba have suggested various strategies which include the following: prolonged engagement, and member checks (cited in Erlandson et al., 1993, pp. 30-31).

Erlandson et al. (1993) refer to prolonged engagement as

> the researcher spending enough time in the context being studied to overcome the distortions that are due to his or her impact on the context, his or her own biases, and the effect of unusual or seasonal events. 'Enough' time in the context (culture) can be considered that amount that enables the researcher to understand daily events in the way that persons who are part of that culture (i.e. natives) interpret them. (p. 30)

This researcher's stay in each school involved a minimum of four weeks. This amount of time, coupled with the researcher's extensive background experience in school systems, in the researcher's opinion should have been sufficient to overcome those "distortions" mentioned above.

Member checks, as the name suggests, involve verifying both the data and the interpretations with those participants who have provided the specific data being interpreted. Erlandson et al. (1993) cautioned that "no data obtained through the study should be included in it if they cannot be verified through member checks" (p. 31). After the interviewees had received their transcripts and had verified their accuracy, individual statements listing the various interpretations in light of the general and subsidiary research questions were given to each interviewee for further verification.

Transferability

An inquiry is judged in terms of the extent to which its findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Whether these findings hold in some other context at some other time is according to these writers "an empirical issue, the resolution of which depends upon the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts" (p. 316). They averred that

> the naturalist inquirer cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. . . . The naturalist inquirer is responsible for providing the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description. (p. 316)

The transferability of the findings of this particular study will be determined by readers on the basis of how well they believe the context, in which they wish to use the findings, matches those contexts described in this study.

Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability refers to an inquiry being able to provide its audience with evidence that if it were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same or similar context, its findings would be repeated (p. 290). The criterion of consistency or reliability is essential to an inquiry. To provide for a check on dependability, Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested that the researcher make it possible for an external check to be conducted on the processes by which the study was conducted (p. 34). This, these authors suggest, can be done by "providing an 'audit trail' that provides documentation (through critical incidents, documents, and interview notes) and a running account of the process (such as the investigator's daily journal) of the inquiry" (p. 34). As

this researcher maintained a daily journal of the various processes utilized in the study, conducting an audit trail should not present any difficulty.

Confirmability

Finally, an inquiry is judged in terms of the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Erlandson et al. (1993) pointed out that the naturalistic researcher does not attempt to ensure that observations are free from contamination by the researcher but rather to trust in the "confirmability" of the data themselves (p. 34). "This means that data (construction, assertions, facts, and so on) can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corroborating wholes is both explicit and implicit" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). Confirmability, in a manner similar to dependability, is communicated via an audit. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the researcher's daily journal should facilitate that process.

Ethical Issues

To comply with the requirements listed in the document titled "University Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants" (1991), the following procedures were utilized to protect the participants in the study:

1. Written permission to conduct the study in three of its schools was obtained from the Edmonton Public School District.
2. The study's purpose and process were clearly explained to the three principals prior to gaining access to the schools and prior to each interview.

3. Data (actual audiotapes, field notes, transcripts) were filed in a secure location. All information collected during the research was treated as confidential.
4. Schools and school personnel participating in the study were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
5. Participants were informed that they could opt out of the study at any time during the study.
6. All transcribing of the interview data was done by the researcher thus ensuring confidentiality.

The study proposal was submitted to an Ethics Review Committee in the Department of Educational Administration and the appropriate approval was granted.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research design and the methodological procedures utilized in this study. A case study approach was determined by the researcher to be the most appropriate method available to meet the purposes of the study. The chapter also addressed concerns related to the trustworthiness of the data and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first describes the development of school-based management in the Edmonton Public School District and the second section gives a description of each of the three school sites utilized in the study. The purpose of this section on the development of school-based management is to provide the context or "backdrop" for the Edmonton Public School District deciding to get involved in school-based management at a time when there was very little happening throughout the world in this decentralized approach to school governance. In the second section describing the three school sites involved in the study, an effort is made to maintain participant and school anonymity as well as participant confidentiality. Also, for reporting purposes, schools and study participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

The Beginnings of School-based Management

As the story goes (B. McIntosh, personal communication, Sept. 19, 1994), there once was a principal in Edmonton Public Schools who wanted to develop a library in his school. He called the Director of Library Services at the central office and received assurance that he would be able to obtain some books from the district to make his library operational. He then contacted the maintenance director at the central office looking for a supply of lumber in order to make shelves for the library but his request was turned down. He was told that there was no money left for that kind of expenditure. A few days later, maintenance workers showed up at his school with a supply of new doors and informed

him that it was time for his school doors to be replaced. The principal protested and explained that he didn't need doors but rather shelving for his library. In disgust, he told the workers to take back the doors!

This actual account does serve to illustrate the significance of the concept of local decision making, the very basis of school-based management. Prior to 1976, the Edmonton Public School District operated under a very centralized system of school management and principals and teachers, who worked under this centralized system, readily admit that the above story was just one of many examples of that type of decision making (B. McIntosh, personal communication, Sept. 19, 1995). This was symptomatic of what schools and their personnel tolerated prior to the introduction of school-based management or what was locally referred to at that time as "school-site budgeting".

The Arrival of Dr. Jones

In 1968 an American educator, Dr. Rolland Jones became superintendent of the Edmonton Public School District. According to M. A. Kostek (personal communication, Feb. 9, 1995), Jones was a "visionary 20 years ahead of his time" who believed that every principal should be "superintendent of his school". It bothered the chief superintendent that principals did not have the decision-making power he felt was necessary for them to run their schools as effectively as possible. Jones believed that central office administrators and supervisors should serve schools and their principals in an advisory and consultative capacity. Although Jones was keen on the philosophy of site-based decision making, he was unable to operationalize the concept and under his tenure, no significant actions were taken to further advance the concept.

However, during Jones' period as superintendent, a young school administrator by the name of Michael Strembitsky was rising through the ranks to eventually become Jones' executive assistant. It was while working under Rolland Jones, who was perceived by many as "Strem's mentor", that Strembitsky began to consider this whole notion of site-based decision making (M. A. Kostek, personal communication, Feb. 9, 1995). Having served as a school administrator in the Edmonton system, Strembitsky had first-hand knowledge of the kinds of decisions being made by central office personnel and it too perturbed him that although principals had the legal authority of being ultimately responsible for everything that went on in their schools, they lacked the financial resources and the flexibility to deploy those resources as they saw fit.

Dr. Jones resigned from Edmonton Public Schools in 1972 and returned to the United States to serve as superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District in North Carolina (Kostek, 1992). Michael Strembitsky served as acting superintendent in the interim and was officially appointed superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools in 1973.

The Pilot Project

Strembitsky was now in a position where he could work towards operationalizing his thinking regarding site-based decision making (M. A. Kostek, personal communication, Feb. 9, 1995). In late 1975 he invited schools in the Edmonton Public School District to volunteer to participate in a pilot project on "school-based budgeting". According to R. P. Baker (personal communication, Dec. 20, 1994), the invitation provided little detail about the project because the terms of reference were to be developed with the schools chosen to participate. However, principals were aware that if their schools were chosen to

participate, they would be involved in developing a budget which could respond to the individual needs of their schools. The seven schools selected to participate in the pilot--Grovenor, Hardisty, Kensington, M. E. LaZerte, Lynnwood, Parkdale, and W. P. Wagner--were announced early in 1976.

The terms of reference and parameters for the pilot, which ran for three years from 1976 to 1979, were as follows (Baker, 1977):

- budgets were to run concurrently with the school operation year--September to August;
- budgets were to reflect short and long term goals;
- budgets were prepared by program (e.g., Language Arts, Mathematics. Custodial, Utilities etc.);
- the budgets were to be used as an authorization and control document;
- the school board had to approve each budget prior to commencement of the operating period;
- principals were designated as signing authorities for designated programs;
- average salaries were used for budgeting purposes;
- 1976 budget dollars were used with allowance to be made in 1977 for inflation and salary negotiations;
- provincial curriculum guidelines were to be observed;
- contracts with Board employees were not to be violated;
- the project was not to be used to circumvent problems for which procedures were already developed. (pp. 54-55)

Not long after Strembitsky became superintendent, he hired planner Alan Parry whose primary responsibility was to develop a system for school-based budgeting. Parry is regarded by many as the architect of school-based management in the Edmonton Public School District and although he confronted numerous obstacles in setting up that system, he was tenacious in those efforts (M. A. Kostek, personal communication, Feb. 9, 1995). Those efforts included Parry visiting the Dade County School District in Florida and the Orange County School District in California where school-based management had been in operation for some time. It was during the Californian trip that he met two consultants,

Fred Wellington and Les Shuck, who provided invaluable assistance to the Edmonton Public School District during the pilot stage and the early district-wide implementation years.

R. P. Baker (personal communication, Dec. 20, 1994), and Victor Nakonechny (personal communication, Dec. 21, 1994), two of the pilot principals, recalled that when their schools had decided to get involved in the pilot project, there was a certain amount of apprehension and anxiety on the part of teachers . "They nor I weren't quite sure what we were getting ourselves into but overall there was a considerable amount of co-operation from teachers and that certainly was instrumental in making the pilot work", commented Baker.

The Role of the School Board

Although the Edmonton Public School District is well-recognized in the literature on school-based management (e.g., Brown, 1990; Herman & Herman, 1993; Mohrman & Wohlstetter, 1994), it appears that the School Board itself has not received the appropriate recognition for its leadership role in approving Superintendent Strembitsky's pilot initiative and eventual district-wide implementation of the concept (J. Cowling, personal communication, Feb. 15, 1995).

Former board chairperson Joan Cowling, who spent 12 years as a trustee and who began her term of service in 1980, the first year of the district-wide implementation, has suggested that the public and at times the trustees themselves, didn't always appreciate the leadership role that the board played in facilitating the start of school-based management in the Edmonton Public School District (J. Cowling, personal communication, Feb. 15,

1995). She too recalled the anxiety and uncertainty of teachers in the district when the decision was made to go district-wide: "It was certainly a classic example of a paradigm shift and the first year was a real learning experience for all of us". During the implementation years, principals were invited to meet with board subcommittees to discuss their educational plans and Cowling recalled that it was around 1984 or 1985 when the concept of school-based management seemed to "become institutionalized and have taken on a life and philosophy of its own" (J. Cowling, personal communication, Feb. 15, 1995).

Obstacles to Implementation

In retrospect, one can now agree that the strategy of starting off with a seven school pilot project was certainly a successful one. In the late 1970s there was a paucity of written information on the concept and apart from some isolated efforts in the United States and none in Canada, there were no locations where Edmonton Public administrators could go to view a model operation (M. A. Kostek, personal communication, Feb. 9, 1995).

In fact, Edmonton was indeed "blazing new trails" and of course there were a number of obstacles that had to be overcome. One of the most obvious obstacles at the time was the resistance on the part of central office personnel who worked in the area of finances. One gets the impression that those personnel were rather skeptical as to whether or not school principals could actually handle the financial end of the process (B. McIntosh, personal communication, Sept. 19, 1994). Also, with control over the finances, these individuals wielded considerable power over the schools and perceived their very existence

and employment to be threatened by the introduction of school-based management. Consequently, it was obvious that many roadblocks had to be overcome.

Another impediment at that time was the lack of computerization at the central office. This computerization would have greatly facilitated the generation of much-needed data for making budgetary decisions (A. Durand, personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994). Hours and hours of tedious, time-consuming manual labor were expended in order to come up with information such as determining allocations which was vital to the decision-making process.

In spite of these impediments, the tenacity and perseverance of Michael Strembitsky, Alan Parry and others, along with the leadership and supportive role of the trustees, paid off and became a reality (M. A. Kostek, personal communication, Feb. 9, 1995). As Kostek (1992) has so eloquently stated,

> For years, educators have discussed the benefits of decision making at the school level by people who are affected by those decisions--students, parents, teachers and principals. The theorizing has stopped in Edmonton where site-based management has been a reality for over a decade. (p. 432)

The Allocation System

Andre Durand of the Edmonton Public School District (personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994), in reflecting back over the introduction of school-based management, recalled that the change in structure the district experienced when converting to school-based management was a very significant one. Now principals were expected to take on a new role with a much greater emphasis on planning, decision making, and involving teachers in those processes. To assist principals in becoming more proficient in those new roles, the

central office provided consulting services which were available on a voluntary basis to school administrators.

One of the greatest challenges facing the district with the advent of this decentralized approach to school governance was deciding how to allocate financial resources to individual schools (A. Durand, personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994). Prior to the transition to school-based management, schools received a printout late in the previous school year listing how much money they would be allocated for the various departments. There was a limited amount of flexibility with those allocated amounts. And of course, principals, who were very astute politically, knew of different ways to increase those amounts for their schools. Traditionally, two percent of the money utilized by schools actually went out to the schools. With this district-wide change, it would eventually increase to approximately 75 percent.

Durand (personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994) emphasized that one of the things the central office held "very sacred and guarded with our lives was the concept that if you're going to give people responsibility, you must also give them the resources. You cannot say to them you will now have the responsibility but we are going to control the money." The challenge, after it had been decided as to what responsibilities were going to the schools and what responsibilities would stay with the district, was to determine how to actually distribute the monies to allow individual schools to meet those responsibilities. The "paradigm shift", earlier mentioned by Cowling, came into play because schools now had to make decisions which, under the previous centralized system, were made for them--how many supplies, equipment, services were needed, what levels of staffing were

required to offer their programs, what kind of staff mix with regards to certificated and noncertificated staff would be sufficient to offer programs and so forth. Responsibility now lay with the schools for making those kinds of decisions. Previously, those decisions were taken by central office with some input from the schools.

The district office was very keen on having the allocations "student-driven and not supply-driven, not equipment-driven, not staff-driven so that there would be a way to distribute the money and to get away from the old concept of having supplies-equipment-services (SES) money assigned and staff money assigned" (A. Durand, personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994). Durand further stated that "it was important for us to shake the tree so as to get as much money out of the tree as possible". Central office supervisors responsible for the various subject areas were reluctant to give away their budgets and what it came down to in the final analysis was that "it took a group of central office administrators with a single purpose of determining what was to go to the schools to decide which resources would be decentralized" (A. Durand, personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994).

The next step in the allocation process was to try and come up with a relative weighting for students. That weighting procedure resulted in various ratios being developed (the baseline ratio being 1.00) which attempted to relate to the actual needs of students. It is important to remember here that this system was a completely new way of allocating financial resources and that this system was not one that was being used by the provincial government at that time.

As the school district made decisions regarding the allocation of financial resources to the schools, in a similar vein, the schools would then have to make their own decisions regarding the deployment of those resources. And back in the early 1980s when school-based management went system-wide, this was indeed quite a dramatic shift in the way decisions were made.

In the 1985-86 school year a review of the allocation system was conducted and it was decided to move from a whole listing of individual student categories to a grouping of categories called "levels". Over the years the system was further streamlined and today there are eight levels serving as the basis of allocation.

Back in the early years of school-based management, it took central office personnel three to four weeks to get back to the schools with confirmation of the actual amounts of money they would be receiving after the September 30 cutoff date. Today with computerization, that same confirmation period has been reduced to approximately five calendar days.

A Final Word

Although individuals such as former school trustee Cowling are quick to acknowledge that school-based management is by no means the perfect system, she is of the opinion that this decentralized approach represented a dramatic improvement in the way schools were administered (J. Cowling, personal communication, Feb. 15, 1995).

Schools Participating in the Study

Three schools were selected to participate in the study--an elementary school, a junior high school and a senior high school. These schools (pseudonyms) were Lincoln Elementary, Valleyview Junior High, and Jordan High. A detailed description of each school follows.

Lincoln Elementary School

Lincoln Elementary School is located in an affluent neighborhood of Edmonton and has a student population of 235 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. The school has a teaching staff of 14, a support staff of four, and one administrator. The school's population has a large percentage of international students.

Prior to the researcher actually moving into the school for the four week visit, he met with the principal and was given an overview of the school and its programs. Following this discussion, the principal gave the researcher a tour of the school and introduced him to several members of the teaching and support staff. The researcher's initial impression of an excitement and an eagerness on the part of the school principal and the staff to have him spend that amount of time in the school was very evident during that first visit and was subsequently confirmed during the four week visit.

The school building is approximately 30 years old and is in excellent condition. It was very obvious to the researcher that the head custodian, whom the researcher will refer to as Josef, was extremely conscientious in his work and took a great deal of personal pride in keeping the school well-maintained. Possessing excellent human relations skills, Josef was quite comfortable in discussing matters related to school maintenance with all staff members including the principal. In addition to being very willing and capable of offering

suggestions to improve various aspects of maintaining the school, he was equally receptive to suggestions from the staff.

An integral part of the school was the resource center or library. Located in the center of the school, it was accessible to students from several different directions. This center was a constant beehive of activity, beginning each morning when there was a short school-wide period for silent reading. Various classes would come into the center and sit in every available space to do their reading. During regular classes students would frequently come into the library to do independent research, calling upon the school librarian from time to time to assist them with their work.

One of the most impressive programs in operation at Lincoln was what the principal referred to as the "student leadership program". This involved the senior class in the school, the Grade 6's, being given an assortment of leadership responsibilities which included: the school crossing patrol; being in charge of the general office--taking phone calls, directing visitors and so on--during the lunch break; doing the morning announcements on the public address system; and being in charge of planning and hosting the weekly school assembly held on Thursday mornings. This assembly involved skits, and performances by different classes, important announcements from the principal or other staff members, and presentations by visiting groups. This program was instrumental in helping students develop a positive self-concept as well as important communication and public speaking skills.

Communication to students, teachers, and parents was a high priority at Lincoln. At the front entrance to the school was a flip chart that welcomed special guest visitors to

the school. Arriving for his first day at the school, the researcher was met with a "Welcome to Mr. Delaney" notice on the chart. Other brief announcements were also included. In the staffroom was a whiteboard which the school principal would utilize everyday in informing teachers of any daily activities worthy of note. It was quite common to see teachers standing in the staffroom reading this "daily memo". Another means of communication was the laptop computer or power notebook. Each teacher was issued a laptop computer for the school year which, apart from being a tool for word processing, was used for electronic mail (e-mail). Most of the administrative memos (school-wide and to individual staff members) were done electronically. Also, teachers would e-mail each other when the need arose.

Another worthwhile vehicle for communication was the weekly staff meeting held at lunch time every Monday. Although this was a very short meeting (approximately 25 minutes), it was quite valuable in bringing teachers up-to-date and provided teachers with the opportunity to raise any concerns they had. Teachers chaired this session on a rotating basis and provided them with opportunities to hone their leadership skills. The principal was very keen on promoting Barth's concept of "community of learners" (1990, p. 9) among all the stakeholders at Lincoln and was able to successfully operationalize this concept in her everyday actions.

The involvement of parents was a high priority at Lincoln. This involvement took the form of the following:

- parents helping out in the classroom, assisting individual students on a one-to-one basis or working with small groups;

- parents assisting teachers by designing charts and posters, photocopying, and laminating materials;
- parents volunteering to accompany classes on field trips;
- parents assisting with fundraising activities such as the annual bottle drive;
- parent participation in the home-school association which functioned in the way a school council would;
- parents acting as guest speakers in various subject areas such as Social Studies;
- parents volunteering to come in and read to students particularly at the primary level.

Teachers were quite receptive to this parental involvement and viewed it in a very positive, non-threatening way.

During the four week visit the researcher, in addition to having the chance to observe what was going on as detailed in the above, made teachers aware of the fact that he was available to visit classrooms and to assist teachers in whatever ways they deemed appropriate. That involvement on the part of the researcher included:

- reading stories to the Kindergarten classes;
- visiting the Math class in a Grade 3-4 classroom and assisting the teacher in conducting group activities;
- going on the annual daylong Grade 5 orienteering fieldtrip; prior to this trip, the researcher, along with several parents, participated in an orienteering inservice conducted by the Grade 5 teacher;
- working with students on an individual basis--special projects-- in the library;

- filling in for the Grade 6 teacher (Math and Physical Education) when she became sick one afternoon and had to go home;
- accompanying the two Grade 3-4 classes on a field trip to the Canada Forestry Center;
- visiting one of the Grade 3-4 classes and helping students to prepare apple tarts for a project in Social Studies;
- assisting everyday with outside supervision during the morning and afternoon recess periods;
- administering the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) to two students.

Personal Reflections on Lincoln Elementary School

The above researcher activities, coupled with the interviews he conducted with six staff members, provided ample opportunity for the researcher to formulate two major perceptions about Lincoln Elementary and the work that was going on there. A discussion of those perceptions follows.

Perhaps the most compelling perception left in the researcher's mind was the high degree of professionalism which prevailed at Lincoln. The school principal with her collaborative leadership style can certainly be given considerable credit for that professionalism; however, the staff is also equally deserving of such credit. Lincoln was very much a student-centered school and that focus was evident in every effort expended by the teachers and support staff.

Coupled with that high degree of professionalism was the promotion of a very positive school climate at Lincoln, positive not only for students but for all who entered its doors. This exemplified itself in a bright colorful building with murals, plants, and park benches throughout. Although there were times when teachers were presented with the usual

classroom management and discipline challenges, these situations were always handled very professionally. One could see that teachers enjoyed coming to work at Lincoln and that positive attitude carried over to their work in the classroom. Another aspect which contributed to that professionalism was the considerable attention given to the teaching and learning process. The researcher attended staff meetings and special inservice meetings where this was the primary focus. In fact, instructional leadership on the part of all teachers and obviously including the principal appeared to be a way of life at Lincoln.

In summary, the researcher was very grateful to have had the opportunity to spend four weeks in a school such as Lincoln where professionalism and a positive climate were a part of regular school life. It is important to remember that professionalism and school climate of the extent prevalent in this school do not happen by accident, but rather by design. The school administration and all staff members are to be commended for operating what the researcher would truly call an "excellent school".

Valleyview Junior High School

Valleyview Junior High School is also located in an affluent neighborhood in the city of Edmonton. Its grade seven to nine population of 740 students is served by 37 teachers, seven support staff, and one administrator. The student population ranges from students who have learning disabilities to students who have been placed in academic challenge classes.

Valleyview is approximately 40 years old and is in fair condition for a building of that age. One obvious deficiency was that the building did not have a cafeteria for students staying in for lunch. Apparently, in earlier years, the majority of students walked home for lunch and it was the policy of the school district at that time not to include cafeterias in the building design of junior high schools. Today, the majority of Valleyview's students remain in school for lunch and eat in the corridors (benches are provided) and in some classrooms. This situation presents quiet a challenge to the custodial staff as they were kept very busy during the school day, especially after lunch hour, in ensuring the building remained clean.

The program of studies at Valleyview is a comprehensive one. At the Grade 7 level in addition to the core subjects, courses are offered in Industrial Arts, Home Economics, Music, Art, and First Aid. Grade 8 students may opt for courses in Home Economics, Drama, Music, Art, and Computer Studies. Similar courses are available to the Grade 9's. An Academic Challenge program has been set up at each level for those students who are gifted academically and there are also two classes for students who have difficulty with the core courses. These groupings are referred to as the junior and senior adaptation classes.

Because the school is located in a part of Edmonton which attracts a considerable number of immigrants each year, there is also an English as a Second Language (ESL) class.

Although the researcher had always worked in schools which housed students from Grades 7 to 12, this experience--that of being involved with junior high students in a separate school building--was a new one. The first impression the researcher received, and this was quite understandable, was the high energy level of students. Not that there was anything out of the ordinary with this but the researcher's past experience involved junior high students being interspersed with senior high students, a situation in which the junior high students do not stand out. At Valleyview the energy level hit you when you walked in the door and down the corridors. That energy level, channeled in the right direction, offered tremendous potential for the school. This was most evident in the school's extracurricular program. Basketball, volleyball, and downhill skiing were very popular and successful extracurricular programs. The researcher arrived early at school each morning and took advantage of that time to walk the corridors, meeting and chatting with students. POGS was the current craze among the Grade 7 students and the corridors and classrooms were full of POGS players. Even though there was a minimal amount of teacher supervision at this time of the morning, it did not present a problem. Other students just stood or sat around socializing.

The researcher has always been of the opinion that it takes a special breed of teachers to be effective at the junior high level. The teachers at Valleyview seem to "fit that bill" in that they have considerable respect and empathy for students of that age. During the four weeks there, the researcher never ceased to be impressed with how the teachers conducted themselves in dealing with the usual challenges presented by this particular age group of

students. It seemed that all the teachers were at Valleyview because they wanted to be there and that is perhaps one of the advantages a huge district such as Edmonton Public has; with 198 schools, the district has considerable flexibility in being able to accommodate teacher requests for school transfers. The researcher would conjecture that all the teachers at Valleyview had requested to work in a junior high setting, a situation which would be the envy of many principals responsible for that grade level. In the researcher's experience, the majority of teachers do not want to teach at that level because of the unique challenges that it offers.

In addition to interviewing several members of the staff during his stay in the school, the researcher was also involved in the following activities:

- made a visit to the senior adaptation class and observed students viewing a CD-ROM unit in Social Studies;
- participated in a laboratory experiment in two Grade 9 Science classes;
- visited a Grade 8 Home Economics class and observed the lesson in progress;
- observed a Grade 9 Physical Education class doing aerobics;
- visited a Grade 9 Outdoor Education class and observed them preparing for their annual winter camping experience;
- visited a Grade 7 Outdoor Education class and observed them preparing bannock on an open fire on a cold November day;
- observed a Grade 9 French class;
- attended a faculty meeting;
- visited a Grade 7 French class;

- visited an ESL class and talked with several immigrant students;
- had informal conversations with several parent-volunteers;
- attended a general school assembly.

Another interesting aspect of Valleyview observed by the researcher was the school's participation in the Phase 1, 2, and 3 Teacher Education Practicums sponsored by the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education. During the researcher's time at the school, student teachers in all three phases were present and were very well received by the teachers and especially by the school principal. Subsequent discussions with these students indicated a high degree of satisfaction with both their teaching experience at Valleyview and the attitude of the academic and non-academic staff towards their being in the school.

As at Lincoln, communication was an essential aspect of daily life at Valleyview. In addition to regular public address announcements, each morning the principal would post a memo to teachers in the staffroom informing them of activities happening that day and various other items of importance to teachers. Communication to parents was equally important with regular newsletters being mailed home to keep parents up-to-date. Also, the home-school association met on a regular basis, providing valuable input into the various school initiatives.

Personal Reflections on Valleyview Junior High School

The researcher came away from Valleyview with two major impressions, both of which were highly positive. The first involved the professionalism of staff members. It was quite evident that all staff members were at Valleyview because they wanted to be there. As mentioned earlier, a junior high school presents several unique challenges to teachers.

However, the teachers at Valleyview appeared to take those challenges in stride and went about their daily work with considerable energy and an abundance of patience. In fact, there were times when the researcher experienced concerns that perhaps they were working too hard which might eventually result in burnout. The age range of these teachers was a blended one meaning that there were some very young teachers ranging to teachers who had 20 years plus teaching experience. This blend seemed to work quite well and from researcher discussions and observations, was one that had garnered the respect of the majority of students. The energy levels of both students and teachers complemented each other.

The other impression had to do with the positive school climate in existence at Valleyview. A population of over 700 junior high school students has the potential of creating many crisis management situations. However, such was not the case at Valleyview. The school did not function in a strict, authoritative manner with an emphasis on a long list of school rules and regulations. On the contrary, the atmosphere throughout the school was a fairly relaxed one with an emphasis on self-discipline.

The school principal at Valleyview is an administrator of many years experience in the Edmonton Public School District. Having had the opportunity to observe and study his administrative style during the four weeks, the researcher has concluded that he is indeed a very wise school principal who has tremendous respect for the worth and dignity of all individuals, especially junior high students. That respect is most evident in his daily contacts with students on his rounds of the school. It is obvious that he has also gained a high degree of respect from students, parents, and staff members alike.

In summary, professionalism and a positive school climate would appear to be essential characteristics of an effective school. Those characteristics, coupled with that wise leadership alluded to above, left the researcher with a very good feeling about Valleyview Junior High.

Jordan High School

Located in a middle class neighborhood in Edmonton, Jordan High School has a student enrollment of 1650 students supported by a teaching staff of 83, a support staff of 15 and an administrative staff of four (three assistant principals and one principal). The school houses students from Grades 10 to 12 with a variety of academic remediation to advanced placement classes. The students come from a number of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The school operates on a departmental basis with each department head serving as a member of the school's advisory council which meets on a regular basis and functions as an advisory body to the school's administration. The departmental structure had recently gone through a reorganization and had been reduced from eight departments to five: Math and Science; Humanities; Physical Education and Athletics; Student Services; and Options (Automotives, Computer Technology, Art, and Music).

The researcher, prior to beginning his four week stay in the school, met with the principal and toured the school building. The principal was very receptive to having her school participate in the study and she expressed considerable optimism in the researcher's being well received by all staff members.

The researcher's first challenge was to get to know the 83 teachers by name and to begin building a rapport with them whereby he would feel comfortable in approaching

individuals to request their involvement in the study. With there being several teacher staffrooms around the school, the place that best facilitated this process of getting to know teachers by name was the mailroom. It was in this mailroom where the researcher situated himself over a period of three days and introduced himself to anyone coming in to check their mail. The process worked and resulted in the researcher meeting all teachers and support staff. Lunch hour also facilitated this process as the majority of the staff ate in a common dining room.

Jordan High School is very large and it takes some time to become familiar with the various sections of the building. After meeting teachers in the mailroom, the researcher ventured out into the corridors of the school and eventually became accustomed to the different parts of the building. The building is approximately 30 years old and is in very good condition. Over the years a number of renovations have been made to the building including extensive renovations to the general office and the administrative offices. The Cosmetology Department recently underwent major renovations resulting in an ultramodern facility. A drama room was recently added as well.

During the researcher's four week visit to the school, he was involved in the following activities:

- a tour of the Automotive Mechanics Department;
- a tour of the Graphic Arts laboratory;
- a visit to the Drama Room;
- a tour of the school's resource center;
- a visit to an Art 30 class;

- a visit to an English 20 drama production celebrating the Halloween holiday;
- a visit to a Foods class in progress;
- a visit to a Keyboarding class in progress;
- participation in three administrative meetings (attended by the principal and the assistant principals);
- a visit to a Math 23 class;
- a guest presentation to two Social Studies 10 classes;
- attendance at a football game between Jordan High and another large Edmonton high school;
- a lengthy visit to the Cosmetology Department; during this visit the researcher had the opportunity to speak with the instructor, her students and several senior citizens who availed of the cosmetology services offered by the students;
- extensive discussions with the head custodian regarding the upkeep and maintenance of the building;
- extensive discussions with the police services officer stationed in the school; these discussions centered around the various proactive and reactive activities the officer was involved with on a daily basis;
- numerous discussions with teachers, support staff, administrators, and students.

The program at Jordan is also a very comprehensive one. The full complement of Alberta Education high school courses is offered, catering to students who are weak academically to those who are gifted academically and enrolled in various Advanced Placement courses. In the researcher's interview with the principal, he was told about the "Pilot for Success Program" which provided extra teaching resources to students in their

first year at the school who had not been very successful in the previous year. The majority of these students were successful in obtaining credits in a reduced workload during their first year at Jordan and moved onto an increased courseload in their Grade 11 year. One of the emphases at Jordan is on their counseling program. Because Jordan basically has an open door policy regarding admissions, the school attracts a number of students who have experienced difficulty in other high schools in the city. The school philosophy, as articulated in the researcher's interview with one of the assistant principals, is one of giving all students a chance at succeeding. Such a caring approach necessitates the need for a strong counseling department to work with those at-risk students. It would appear from the researcher's observations that this approach was working and there existed in the school a very positive approach to students and the challenges they presented.

Another emphasis at Jordan High is on school-community partnerships. The school has established partnerships with the local hospital, senior citizens groups, the local shopping mall, police services, and plans were presently ongoing to set up a partnership with a local artists' guild. School personnel perceived these partnerships as a way of bridging the gap between the school and the community.

Personal Reflections on Jordan High School

The researcher left Jordan High with impressions very similar to those gained from the other two school visits. Before elaborating on those impressions, a comment on an initial reaction is worthy of note. The researcher had never been involved with a school which housed 1650 students before. In fact, his last principalship was in a school of 700 students, a school considered quite large by his standards. A student population of 1650

with an academic and non-academic staff of 102 appeared to be a little intimidating but at the same time rather intriguing. "Mega" seemed to be an appropriate descriptor for such an operation.

The first impression had to do with the high degree of professionalism exemplified by all staff members. This professionalism can be characterized by a positive attitude, an exceptional work ethic, and a sense of collegiality. A certain congeniality permeated the school, resulting in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere appreciated by both students and staff. Similar to what the researcher had seen in the other two schools, there was always a "busy-ness" on the part of staff members. However, despite this "busy-ness", staff members always had time for a friendly chat with each other, very often injected with a little humor.

The researcher was a little apprehensive about going into this big high school to conduct a university study of a somewhat esoteric nature! However, the attitude with which he was received by teachers, support staff, administrators, and students was most accepting and very gratifying. That professionalism and positive attitude obviously contributed in great degree to that acceptance.

Another impression worthy of being commented on is the excellent leadership provided by the school's administrative team. These four individuals, all quite unique in their own ways, had certainly gelled into a highly effective team which had the highest respect of students and staff alike at Jordan High, the school board, and the community at large. The school principal deserves much credit in this regard because she was the one who had orchestrated such a cohesive group.

In summary, the researcher's impressions of Jordan High School were very similar to those gained from Lincoln and Valleyview. Again, professionalism and a positive attitude resulting in a very positive school climate were indeed hallmarks of what the researcher would also refer to as a "good school".

Summary

This chapter provided a brief history of the development of school-based management in the Edmonton Public School District. This history, necessary to put the current system of school-based management in the Edmonton Public School District into context, was compiled from information gleaned in several interviews with a number of key players who were actively involved in that development. Also described in this chapter were the three schools that participated in the study and the researcher's perceptions of those three schools.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher discusses the various categories and themes which emerged from the interview and observation data. The specific categories, each containing several themes, are elaborated upon with specific reference made to the various comments from the study participants. The categories are descriptors, emphases, results, and concerns.

Emergent Categories and Themes

This study examined teachers' and school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Data were collected via interviews and researcher observation. Analysis of these data have yielded four major categories with several underlying themes. According to Merriam (1988), "the development of categories is a part of the analysis process and involves looking for recurring regularities in the data" (p. 133). Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the constructs made explicit by the participants of the study (Goertz & LeCompte, 1984). A discussion on each of those four categories and their respective themes follows.

Descriptors

In both the interview and observation data a number of themes kept recurring which, when analyzed, appropriately fell under the category or heading of "descriptors". These

"descriptors" referred to how participants described the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Specifically, those themes were:

- the notion of improvement as an underlying motivation;
- the amount of time involved;
- a preoccupation with funding and finances;
- the immediacy and local nature of the decision-making process;
- administrator dependence;
- student focus;
- meaningful involvement in the decision-making process;
- flexibility;
- a proactive nature;
- trust.

A discussion of each theme follows.

The Notion of Improvement as Underlying Motivation

Permeating teachers' and school administrators' comments regarding school-based management and school improvement was the thinking that both terms were somewhat complementary. Specifically, the majority of study participants saw school improvement as a very important aspect of school-based management. Assistant principal Marilyn at Jordan High School had this to say about the relationship:

> Everything we do in the schools is geared towards improving the student in some manner, in some facet of their being. It wouldn't make any sense that we wouldn't put the responsibility and the money for doing that closer to where the decisions for that student come. It would seem to me to be an opportunity to optimize what we're doing in the schools. The two terms are very closely-linked.

James, a Science teacher at Jordan, felt that school improvement was an integral feature of the school-based management form of governance:

> If we don't have school improvement, I don't see how school-based management could really work. I think school improvement has to be foremost in our minds--we are all trying to improve our schools for the benefit of students. If school-based management didn't help us do that, it wouldn't be a very useful chore. School improvement has to be paramount to the process.

Valleyview Junior High School principal Aaron perceived school improvement as "what drives school-based management and the concept of improvement is always a part of it, not necessarily in every component of your school operation but in certain key areas that are focused on in any given year". Pauline, a teacher at Valleyview, echoed a similar sentiment: "That's probably what school-based management is all about--improving the learning atmosphere of the student".

A number of teachers were of the opinion that

> school improvement was part of the reason [the school district] looked at going to school-based management. Each school is different and the population that we're serving is different so they thought the people within the school had the best information and the best ideas about how to go about improving their schools. The more control they gave the schools over how to spend the money, hopefully the more they would be able to improve. (Corinne, kindergarten teacher at Lincoln Elementary School)

The Amount of Time Involved

Teachers and school administrators also talked about the importance of time and the importance of considering it as an investment in describing their perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. When asked to address the issue of the time factor involved in school-based management and school

improvement, Leo, an assistant principal at Jordan High School, summarized his thoughts as follows:

> Time doesn't in my opinion concern me because I've always put in the time. I don't see school-based management as having foisted on me this vast amount of time that normally I wouldn't put in anyway. I really don't see that as a major issue. I know for example we set our priorities based on allocations and setting the priorities and budget planning takes a lot of time but the flip side of that is the reason it takes time is that we're getting input from students, staff, and parents. But in actual fact, the awareness of what we're doing as a result of that time is worth that time.

Corinne, a kindergarten teacher at Lincoln Elementary, commented that the time commitment "did seem like a headache around budget-time but it was definitely worth the investment". Christine, the principal of Lincoln, also addressed the issue of time in her comments:

> I think time is one we really have to be careful complaining about--to me time is a resource not something that limits us. And it's a mindset--there are staffs I have friends on and I've been on, where they go way into the evening. I'm very careful about how we structure it here--I always ask staff for input, but yet there will always be the ones that if we go to 5 o'clock once a month, it's too much. I have a hard time with that issue of time and it's one that crops up. But I can look at other research that's not on school-based management and school improvement and it could be on student achievement, the main business we're in, and people always say it's the time to get together, the time to talk. So I'm not so sure how we can say it's just school-based management and school improvement.

Winston, a department head at Jordan High School, questioned whether or not there was enough time in the school day for teachers to be able to contribute to the process. In his words:

> Time is a concern and in theory if you let people make decisions, then they'll take ownership. The only problem is whether or not teachers have enough time to be able to put into the process. It is a question of time.

A Preoccupation with Funding and Finances

A number of participants alluded to the fact that when looking at school-based management and school improvement, funding and finances inevitably came up as a major consideration. Eric, a department head at Jordan High School, expressed concerns with the way funding was currently allocated:

> Right now the way that the system is set up, there is a diversion of funds that are disproportionate to the benefit that they accrue. There is a disproportionate amount of funds that goes to our central administration and I'm not sure we're getting top value for our buck with that money being diverted there as opposed to it being diverted to the school. I think right now it's somewhere around 80 percent of the funding that comes to the school. Maybe it should be around 95 percent and with that extra 15 percent coming to the school, far more could be done than taking that money and tying it up, using it to pay for support services for us.

James at Jordan High took a similar, albeit somewhat philosophical, stance:

> I know the central services are taking away from the allotment of funds that could go to the school and if students come first, then maybe the funds should go first to the students. And after their needs are met, then funds left over could be used for the bureaucracy. Right now, it's the other way around--funding comes from the government to our bureaucracy--they take their share and the rest is given to us. I think the process should be reversed. Let us take what we need and then what's left over could go to them. A theoretical change--it will never happen but we all dream!

Being directly responsible for the expenditures of large amounts of money, schools periodically experienced deficit problems. Efforts to eliminate those deficits required the attention of all school personnel and necessitated extensive efforts on the part of all staff. Lindsay, a teacher at Lincoln Elementary, commented on her staff's involvement in such an effort and its potential benefits:

> The first year I came here we had a twenty thousand deficit. We worked through the year and got that down to zero by working together as a team. In the second year we had a surplus of five thousand dollars.

Aaron, principal of Valleyview Junior High, however, cautioned that one had to be careful about being overly preoccupied with finances:

> There's a danger of being over-preoccupied with the dollars and cents and there is the tendency to do that because you want to balance the budget or stay reasonably within budget. You've got to guard against that but at the same time within our school system I have to say that's been addressed within the way our organization handles it in that you can carry over surpluses and deficits from one year to another.

The ability to control finances was perceived by some study participants to be essential to school-based management and school improvement:

> To me the major feature that over-rides all others is the ability to control money because if you work for a school board or district where you are told from a central office that you have this amount of money but this is how you must spend it, your control is very limited, whereas here we have total control over our money. We have to ensure that we do pay for our electricity, our heat and our maintenance but beyond that we have tremendous freedom as to what we can do. (Lindsay, Lincoln Elementary)

The Immediacy and Local Nature of the Decision-making Process

Teachers and school administrators considered the immediacy and local nature of the decision-making process an integral aspect of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. The following comment by Peter, a teacher at Lincoln Elementary, was typical of participants' comments:

> School-based management has the decision-making process brought down closer to the teacher. With this characteristic that you're making the decisions, ownership is given to the teacher of whatever decision is made and you're more apt to achieve the goals you've set. The local nature of the decision making tends to facilitate school improvement.

Winston from Jordan High described it this way:

> Decisions are made within the building. And of course decisions are made with the approval of staff. I think the biggest significance of school-based management is that the staff gets to decide the direction and the short term and long term priorities that the school wants to set. We're able to set goals and determine the direction in which

the school is going.

A feeling of ownership of decisions appeared to be one positive characteristic that participants felt was crucial to the whole process of school-based management and school improvement:

> The fact that you don't feel like decisions are being imposed on you from someplace else is important. Maybe you're not 100 percent happy with what's decided but you know at least that you decided it as a staff and it's easier to live with than having somebody else say this is how it will happen. (Corinne, teacher at Lincoln Elementary)

Eric at Jordan High stated that "the overall concept [of school based management] really encourages school improvement. You've given the school the right to be a self-governing body and that is the characteristic that allows you to encourage or facilitate school improvement".

Valleyview Junior High specialist teacher Mel was of the opinion that

> having the ability to make more decisions at the school level rather than having them made at central office has quite a positive effect on teachers. Before, they always felt that their hands were tied. Now, people have a lot more freedom to decide on their budget needs and how the school is to be managed.

Valleyview's principal Aaron concurred with that sentiment:

> All decisions that are made in the school I see as related to school improvement. My orientation is that when decisions on programming, personnel, any component vital to the operation of the school is made, it's made not in terms of the school going to central office. The automatic reference is what will we do here, what is our decision going to be, how are we going to tackle this. It's not 'Oh I better get on the phone and see what they will let me do, or what I have to do from central office'. When making these meaningful decisions, our starting point is right here.

Administrator Dependence

One of the most pervasive themes in the comments of study participants involved the dependence on the chief school administrator or principal in the relationship between

school-based management and school improvement. Such dependence was acknowledged by Delores of Lincoln Elementary:

> I think the biggest thing about school-based management and school improvement is that you need a very strong, knowledgeable administrator because ultimately, it is that administrator who makes the final decision. If you have a good administrator, he or she will listen to all staff but ultimately it is the administrator who makes the final decision.

Reflecting on her own personal situation, she continued:

> I think at this school we're fortunate because we have many meetings and we have a lot of input into what the final decision is going to be. However, if you were in another school and didn't have that kind of input, I could see that as a very frustrating experience especially if the administrator did whatever he or she felt like doing. Weak leadership--here we don't have that problem.

Eric, a department head at Jordan High, expressed a similar sentiment and also made reference to the difficulty experienced when the administration was a weak one:

> If there is 'one fly in the ointment' with respect to school-based management and school improvement, it is that there seems to be an overdependence on a very capable, strong leadership or administration. It isn't really a major problem if you have one administrator who isn't able to work as strongly in this autonomous model as you would like when we're dealing with a large school. In a large school you have three, four, possibly five administrators and if you have that many people, if one of them is a weaker link, that will not necessarily result in a total downfall of the school because the other ones will pull up the slack. The real problem where this arises is if you're looking at a jurisdiction, for example, an elementary school that has 125 people in it, you've got an administrator who is in there part-time, and if that administrator is not strong, then you have some potential problems because you don't have anybody to pick up the slack for that particular person.

Comments by Wilson, also a department head at Jordan High, reiterated similar concerns regarding a weak administration. As he explained,

> there is a very real dependence on the administration and on the leadership of a particular school to function properly and if you have a good administrative team, if you have a person who is aware of all the in's and out's, all the innuendoes and subtleties of the school-based management plan, then you're going to have a school that is well informed. If you have somebody who is doubtful or dubious or who doesn't want that or can't delegate the authority or who cannot appease the

> community, you're looking at segmenting a particular school and not having a successful school.

Laura at Lincoln Elementary spoke about the differences in the way that school administrators conducted themselves in the decision-making process and the importance of the administrator to that process:

> Some teachers feel they have a lot of input and it works very well. Others--I think it depends on how the school is run and the administrator. I can't say too much for this school because I'm new this year but when I was at my other school I worked with two different administrators. With one of them, the teachers were a part of the decision making right from step one all the way to completion. But with the other administrator, that individual asked for a lot of input to make us feel like we were involved but yet when it came right down to it, she made the decisions herself. I'm not sure all administrators handle the process the same way.

Valleyview's Mel felt that the principal was the key to making school-based management and school improvement work. In his words,

> I think that if there is school improvement, it's subjective to whoever the school administrator is. In some cases I've seen where there has been real improvement in how the school is run. In other cases I've seen where it's almost a dictatorship on the other end of the scale. I've come to the conclusion after looking at some of this administration and school stuff that it's the principal who's the center of all of this and what happens with school-based management and school improvement seems to be directed more by him than anybody else.

Assistant principal Maxwell at Jordan High reiterated the importance of the chief administrator, while at the same time commenting on his own situation:

> What we have is not a manager as the CEO of this place. Not a manager, not a CEO, not an educator, not a leader but all of these things. And because a good person who is the CEO is the CEO of one of these places, she has to be all of those things that good managers do, that good leaders do--involving a lot of people in making the decisions. And that does happen in our place and you've probably seen some signs of that since you've been here.

The importance of the principal continued to be acknowledged by other participants, including James of Jordan High:

> I think one of the things that will make the biggest difference is your leadership. If you have a strong principal, the tone will be set by administrative policies and hopefully, the staff will be involved in making some of those decisions. That's when I think school-based management and school improvement works best.

Although she concurred that the principal was most important to the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, Valleyview teacher Vivian suggested that school administrators should encourage more collegial leadership. She observed that "the leader is crucial and I would hope that our future leaders encourage more collegial leadership". She cautioned that the process should not depend on one individual: "We're mistaken if we believe that school-based management and school improvement depends solely on one person; rather, there should be a nurturing of teachers and an encouragement of change efforts".

Ryan at Valleyview, in commenting on the importance of the school administrator, was rather unorthodox in his comments concerning the weak administrator. As he explained,

> I tend to think that if you have a weak administrator, that weak administrator can work more effectively in a school-based management and school improvement relationship because when it comes to budgeting time which involves putting together a planning document, that administrator is at least getting some feedback from teachers and by getting that feedback from teachers, teachers have some input and can take some onus and say 'hey, that's part of my plan too, I wanted that and that's what I got' and therefore they can take ownership. I think a weak principal can work better in this situation because there is consultation with teachers.

Student Focus

Study participants described the relationship between school-based management and school improvement as having a student focus. Their comments centered on the notion that the very reason for the existence of school-based management and school

improvement had to do with students and that all efforts to improve schools should have, as their central focus, the needs of students.

Pauline, one of the teachers at Valleyview, verbalized it this way:

> That's probably what it's all about. The goal of school-based management should be an improvement in the learning atmosphere of the student. And when a decision is being made, the administration probably asks themselves that 'finally after all the cows are in the barn' if you will, is this going to lead to an improvement in the student's learning atmosphere. And if yes, then they go with it. If not, then don't go with it. That's the critical thing and I think it's important to be student-oriented.

Wilson at Jordan High also felt that the student should be the primary focus. His comment:

> I think it is very important that you are focused. If you're looking at the general climate of the school, everything has to be considered. What we have to do is to focus in on the student. We have to make the school as student-friendly as possible. But we also have to realize there are limits to what we can go to.

Laura, a teacher at Lincoln, perceived the relationship in a similar way:

> Doing the very best we can for every student--taking into consideration individual differences, special programs that are needed for the kids of varying abilities and so on. There are other things in addition to academics but to me they are kind of secondary. Sure there are improvements to the building itself such as putting in new windows but I guess I think of the kids before I think of all those other things.

Jordan High's Winston suggested that the various programmes offered by the school and activities of a professional development nature for the teachers were largely determined by the needs of students. He elaborated:

> We decide on courses that suit our clientele. For example we have a lot of foreign students and some of the things we've been trying to do, for example, on our last professional development day we discussed integration and discrimination and how to handle this problem of racial differences we're experiencing in the school. Many of the directions we take in the school, we take because of the clientele, the type of student that comes to the school. I think it's easier for us to make those decisions than it would be for someone downtown or in a central office somewhere. We're closer to it than they are.

Aaron, the principal of Valleyview, articulated a very similar viewpoint: "Because meaningful decisions have to be made, our starting point is right here and it's always focused on what are we going to do for the students in this school".

Meaningful Involvement in the Decision-making Process

Meaningful involvement in the decision-making process was another popular theme pervading participants' comments on school-based management and school improvement.

Jordan High's Science teacher James explained it this way:

> If people believe they have input and that their decision will help to count, then they are going to support the process. They will contribute through ideas they have. If this is cut off, then people will say 'Well, it doesn't matter anyway'. We have been very lucky in this school because the channels have been kept open, ideas have been followed up, and some very good suggestions have been made and have been incorporated into our school policies. These suggestions have originated from the grassroots or the staff and student levels. I think this is one of the main features or characteristics that will make the system work.

This meaningful involvement extends not only to teachers but to all stakeholders. Anne-Marie, principal of Jordan High, gave an example of how that was done in her school:

> We involve all stakeholders in the major decisions that we make. So, for example, if we have to do a heavy financial cut, we involve the stakeholders. I could say to my head custodian that I would like for him or her to cut one hundred thousand dollars out of the maintenance budget. The custodian might then determine how that could be done but still maintain the result of having a clean school.

Ryan at Valleyview emphasized that good decisions necessitated widespread involvement of stakeholders:

> I don't think you can make good decisions without the involvement of all stakeholders and that includes teachers, students, parents, and also the community. So you have to have all those stakeholders advised. All of them should have some kind of input before you can make the appropriate decisions.

Wilson of Jordan High suggested that stakeholder involvement had a payback for those stakeholders:

> I think the more you're involved, the more involvement you feel and the more empathy you feel for the decisions that are going on. So I think that is a positive situation. It does have a price but I think at this particular place at this point in time there are some good decisions being made.

Maxwell, an assistant principal at Jordan High, had this to say about meaningful involvement:

> I believe that in many schools, including this one, there is a tremendous amount of time spent in trying to intelligently involve people in trying to make changes and I think the biggest thing you have to do is to get people involved. I believe that the most important part of the entire process is for there to be appropriate catalysts to get things going and those catalysts, male, female, sometimes called principal, but not solely principals--those are very important.

Referring to his own school, he continued:

> I think we're privileged to be working with a group of very competent people here in this place and I know they work at optimal levels and with very very good intent. I think the practices we have for trying to get people involved have been quite sound.

Gerry, a specialist teacher at Jordan High, had several points to make about the value of meaningful involvement and the process itself. He offered this insight:

> At the present time, even the support staff are involved in making decisions as to how the school should run. I think that's beneficial because we always seem to have this gap between us and them, the administrators and the rest of the staff. Having this type of management system brings the teaching staff closer together to the administrative staff and together they make a lot of decisions. So before we start on the school-based budget, before we have the monies coming in, the school as a total body--all the teachers and the support staff try to set priorities as to what we would like to accomplish the following year, provided we have certain amounts of money. Now if we had unlimited amounts of money, we probably would accomplish a lot of things but resources are limited. We have to set certain priorities and we try to stick to those priorities. I think having a broader influence of people being involved in the decision-making process is a positive step for the school. The opportunity for involvement in that process promotes higher morale and effectiveness among teachers. Teachers can see the total school picture and what is necessary even though they may complain at times. Over the years working with this particular management style, we get to

understand the problems that different staff members have. Before, you would hear a little about this or that but you wouldn't really know why they had the problem, why it was a major concern. Now because of this system, all teachers are involved in looking at problems and concerns that exist within the whole school.

Flexibility

Another descriptor used by participants in their comments on the relationship between school-based management and school improvement was the concept of flexibility. Without exception, participants suggested that this was a major characteristic of that relationship.

Assistant principal Leo at Jordan High summarized his thoughts on the significance of flexibility:

> The fact that you're given the finances, the leeway to make decisions on your own. There's the flexibility, there's the opportunity. In our school and in other schools, the school priorities are set with input from the staff, the students, the parents and the community is also involved.

A similar viewpoint was shared by Anne-Marie, Jordan High's principal:

> I think the fact that we're able to write our own plan for the following year and organize for learning the way we think suits our population best. To me, that's the absolute key. If you have a high academic school or you have a high socioeconomic area, you might organize differently than if you were in another area--you have the freedom and the authority to do that. For example, in this school we believe that we need a heavy support system for our students and so we've put our monies and attentions into an advisory program with x number of counselors. That's allowed us to do a whole lot of other things but I had to get no permission for that. That was a staff decision, a school decision supported by parents and we could just go ahead and do it. To me the total freedom and the feeling that you have the competence to do it is very important. There is a support system downtown that said we believe that this school can organize the best way for students and then letting them do it. When we present our plans for student learning, I've never yet had anything turned down. They asked questions to get more information and that's great but they've never said 'No, you may not organize that way'. The critical feature is the flexibility to have as many or as few or a different type of staff--you could have three assistant principals, two assistant principals, two counselors or four counselors, as many support staff or as few support staff as you want. In our school we have found that we need several

aides in the classroom. That's a decision we had to make.

This flexibility as it related specifically to staffing was reiterated by William, a department head at Jordan:

> I think a very important feature of school-based management and school improvement is in the selection of staff and the assignment of staff. Getting to know people, knowing what their strengths and weaknesses are, knowing what their future aspirations are, and that can be done only on a personal, face-to-face level. This enables you to better utilize the resources you have. Again in a jurisdiction of 4 000 teachers, somebody sitting in personnel services looking at figures and numbers can't put a face on it, can't put aspirations to what the assignment is, where a principal and department head can. Somebody who has taught Math for 15, 20 years says 'I would really like to do something different, I'd like to teach a Science class'. We can accommodate that very easily whereas in a centralized assignment system, there would be paperwork galore and the person downtown may not understand the need for, the necessity for change. So I think in being able to assist teachers in meeting their own aspirations and utilizing their strengths to try and avoid their weaknesses--I think that is the biggest thing about encouraging improvement.

William further elaborated on what he perceived to be the results of such flexibility in his own department:

> This approach has allowed our chief administrator and myself to make decisions as to whom we bring on in terms of our teaching staff. Over the last four years we've brought on 10 new people in our department as retirements have moved in. By making our own decisions we've been able to get a group of people who work very well together. The criteria we had for selection was certainly one in terms of curriculum expertise, but much more in terms of ability to work with one another, similar understanding of how kids operate and so on. It's allowed us to form a cohesive team.

Lincoln Elementary School's teacher Delores also spoke of the benefits of flexibility:

> I think the biggest thing is that you have the choices, whatever you think is going to best meet the needs of your students. In whatever it is your particular staff needs help, then your school can make the decision as to what they need. I think by being a teacher or administrator in that school, only you know what is best. Somebody downtown can't say 'Oh, we think you should or should not have money for this and this because they're not there day to day. They don't really know what it is you need.

Lincoln's principal Aaron suggested that such flexibility was needed now more than ever:

> I think to really be able to meet the needs of the public you're serving in your community you've got to have more responsibility in terms of being able to assess and direct the educational program for your school than we once did. Centralization is great when we're dealing with a system and educational milieu at a time when things were in place period. In society there was a more authoritarian structure to things; there was right and wrong and everyone agreed on it, and we did this and everyone was in the same reader and was supposed to be learning at the same rate. If you were doing this and this, you were fine. As we move into a structure that is so pluralistic and just so diverse, I think to have the flexibility to meet those needs, site-based decision making has to come to a greater degree than a lesser.

A Proactive Nature

Although this particular theme was suggested by very few participants, the researcher felt that it was worthy of note. The researcher observed various initiatives being taken by teachers and administrators. However, these initiatives appeared to be more of a reactive nature, responding to the status quo. There were indeed several examples of a proactive nature and these will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

Valleyview's teacher Vivian summarized her thoughts in the following comment:

> I believe there are things that can improve schools like organizing. The way we organize the whole structure, the way we instruct students, the philosophy behind that instruction--being more of a facilitator. All of those types of trends that we know in education that are going to change the way we teach and I don't think we're moving towards those. So I see school improvement and school-based management as being more of a proactive nature. It affects not only students but also staff and there may be some things we can do with staff to help them improve the way they work in their classroom with kids.

Professional development activities, according to several participants, played a part in providing them with opportunities to look at new classroom strategies. Co-operative

learning and introduction of computer-assisted instruction were just two examples of "proactive strategies" being introduced to schools through professional development activities.

Trust

This was another theme that received minimal attention from participants but one which, again, the researcher felt necessary to report on. These participants who did comment on the trust factor felt that in a system operating under a school-based management model, there needed to exist a mutual feeling of trust not only between the school district and its central office and individual schools, but also between a school's administration and its staff and wider community.

Winston at Jordan High elaborated:

> You have to have a great deal of trust. I think it all starts from the top; you have to have trust or faith in the board, that the board is actually going to give you enough money to be able to conduct the program you want in the school. Then you have to trust the school administration, that the administration is in fact making this a democratic process, and then right down to the teacher. The teacher has to have trust and faith to put time into this thing to make it work. And really this thing should be teacher-generated, school-based or whatever you want to call it. The most important thing about this is the teachers trust that their input is going to count for something.

Valleyview's principal Aaron had this to say about trust:

> Having functioned under both a centralized and decentralized system, I would have to say what this system says to me as a school administrator is that we have trust and confidence in you and the professional abilities of your staff to make meaningful decisions. Under the old system the way I felt was that the district thought you needed to be monitored and directed on a large number of things and they would just give you the things to operationalize. The attitude and approach and feeling and tone were totally different--an absolute difference to the way schools operate in a decentralized system.

Emphases

From the interview and researcher observation data, the following eight themes emerged in this category:

- planning;
- professional development;
- importance of the community;
- accountability and results;
- needs;
- academic and non-academic aspects of school improvement;
- autonomy;
- the importance of strong central services to the process.

Summarized in this section are comments from study participants on these various themes.

Planning

Throughout the data there was a considerable amount of discussion emphasizing the planning process and the involvement of people in that planning process. Jordan High's assistant principal Leo had this to say about planning and how it benefited his school:

> We sit down and set our priorities based on improving certain areas. In this school we've shut down areas because of under-enrollment because of the fact that they needed improvement and we couldn't, because of budget cutbacks, afford to improve them. We have areas of the school that we have allocated to community agencies, we have a daycare in the school, we are looking at another area of the school which could have lots of potential for an arts and craft guild. We can't improve these areas but we feel they can and they can make use of it. It's a goal of our management to take those areas and utilize them in the best possible way.

Peter, a teacher at Lincoln Elementary, commented on the planning process in that particular school:

> Part of the process we have gone through involved preparing a budget together. Definite objectives in that budget deal with student achievement and for example this year, one of our areas of emphasis is improvement of Math and Science. In our budget planning process or school management planning process might be a better term for it (because it's not only a budget), we have definite specific clauses that deal with improvement of student achievement.

Wilson, a department head at Jordan High, emphasized the importance of linking school and district priorities in the planning process and also the importance of being involved in the process:

> I guess when you have to sit down and look at the priorities of the school district and decide on three or four of those priorities that you're going to focus in on, and then look at the indicators and the results, and how you're going to implement the plan--when you do this, you have a little more of a feeling for where you're going. You have a little more involvement rather than coming in at the 8th or 9th floor and saying ' Well, here I am, I can forget about the first seven floors, the foundation of the school, and all I'm going to do is add my one or two cents worth and hopefully take it up to the 10th floor'--if you want to use the analogy of a 10th floor skyscraper.

Wilson commented further on the planning process:

> You take the priorities of the school board, adapt them to your particular school, have a basic plan in mind, then flesh out that particular plan. You do the decision making, put in the running of the programs, ensure that the programs follow the directions that have been outlined, and then have some way or means of evaluating those particular decisions.

Another valuable aspect of the planning process is feedback from the various stakeholders. The principal of Lincoln Elementary, Christine, alluded to the importance of that feedback, in addition to the linking of school and district priorities:

> We have a strong district culture in Edmonton Public Schools in that these are our beliefs, and this is what we want to achieve. We have our board priorities and everything we decide to do at the school level is always tied in with that district culture because we believe that it will help to improve what we're hoping to accomplish. I know the two years to date that we have survey information on,

we have experienced incredible growth in student attitude and staff attitude.

The incremental nature of the planning process, coupled with periodical revising and updating, was also paramount in the thinking of various study participants. Ryan at Valleyview Junior High made the following observation:

> From time to time we end up making adjustments or modifications to the overall school plan. It's kind of our lock step situation--in other words, as we see changes, requirements, needs, those kinds of things, we make adjustments as we move.

Professional Development

Study participants emphasized the importance of professional development when discussing the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. They felt that it was important enough to justify monies being spent to upgrade teachers in new strategies and trends. Teacher Delores at Lincoln Elementary referred to the type of professional development her school was involved in:

> We've spent money on professional development. For example, I trained last year with the district for co-operative learning. Consultants from central services came out and coached me. And now as you know, I'm bringing it back to the staff. So hopefully those type of techniques will help improve student achievement. Also, another teacher did a Science inservice and she came back and shared her information with us throughout the year. And of course, these were among our school priorities.

Lincoln's principal Christine also mentioned professional development and the importance of being able to have it tailored to her school and staff needs:

> Last year we looked at the growth we've had as a staff in the past two years. I don't know if we could have done as well if you had a centralized district where you had to do this, this and this. Whereas here, we go based on the needs of our students and our staff. What do we need, what's the information, what are the knowledge and skills our students need right now. What are they for our staff and let's design our professional development plan around that, in fact our whole school plan around that.

Winston at Jordan High accentuated the significance of professional development and the need for teachers to be active in that area:

> I have found in this business about school-based management and school improvement that many teachers haven't put in the time to read current literature, the trends and so on. They kind of get left out when it comes to discussing what we're going to do in the future because they're not really aware of the trends that are taking place. It always seems like a select few who have either done their work or attended meetings elsewhere or the administration because they are in on the new jargon and the new trends. It seems to me it's only a few people who really take part in the process and the rest sort of get carried along because they don't really understand the process or aren't willing to commit enough time to learn. Professional development days along with other inservices would help us address some of these concerns.

Olivia, a department head at Valleyview Junior High, perceived professional development in terms of teacher effectiveness and commented on its emphasis in her school:

> Money has been set aside for substitute coverage for teachers who would care to take advantage of teacher effectiveness programs. One that I was involved in was 10 half days and when you consider the amount of supply teacher time and the cost, that's fairly expensive. But I think the benefits from it are fantastic. We then look at trying to import those kinds of skills and sharing them with the rest of the staff.

Importance of the Community

Study participants were very cognizant of the importance of the community in discussing the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. They perceived the community as having a significant role to play in that relationship. That role centered around input into the decision-making process. Assistant principal Leo at Jordan High vocalized how his school involved its community:

> I think the fact that the community feel they have more input is a very positive characteristic. When we set out our priorities, they are set out only after there has been input from the community. We also discuss our priorities with community groups using school facilities. And by input, we mean face-to-face discussions and

surveys.

Leo further emphasized Jordan High's involvement with the community:

> More and more we're looking at having our students get out and gain an understanding of the community they live in and the part they can play in that community. I think we have a responsibility to have students leave the school with not only a sense of curricular knowledge but also with an idea of how they fit into the community. We want them to get more and more exposure to the adults in the community and oftentimes, students don't have a lot of significant adults in their life. If we can get them out into the community, job shadowing for example, and we can have community members coming into the school, I think there will be an impact. It should make a difference.

A desire to recognize the needs of the community also received attention in participants' comments. Eric at Jordan High elaborated on one of his school's priorities in that area:

> I think the joy of school-based management and its relationship to school improvement is the ease with which we can respond to the needs of the community. There are numerous examples taking place right now. We've been fragmented in the way our society has gone. We have senior citizens in one particular sector of society, we have working people in another sector, we have students in another. We have all of these little private domains and ignorance of the other domains results in fear from whatever group to the other groups. In trying to re-integrate, we're sending our students out to senior citizen homes, we're inviting senior citizens to come into our school--that sort of thing.

Lincoln Elementary's principal Christine posited that involvement of the community helped to shape the school's programs. In her words, "School-based management to me gives schools the opportunity to mold teaching and learning in the direction that needs to be for their community".

Valleyview Junior High teacher Glenda made a similar point as she reflected on the importance of the community to her school:

> I think every school is very unique in its community. The community that it's in helps us make certain decisions about what kinds of monies we want to spend. For example, in this school the community in general and the parents in particular are

very enthusiastic about fine arts and so there is a lot of pressure to make sure there is a fair amount of money spent on fine arts--the Music Department, Art and so on.

Accountability and Results

Continually being emphasized throughout participants' comments were the interrelated concepts of accountability and results. Although they perceived the relationship between school-based management and school improvement as a process, accountability and results were "the bottom line" as one participant phrased it. Teacher Corinne at Lincoln Elementary mentioned one way staffs have attempted to address the accountability issue:

At Edmonton Public we do a lot of surveys with the students, parents, and the staff just to try and be accountable for the things we are doing. That helps us to look at our goals and gives us some idea as to how we're doing in trying to reach those goals.

Lincoln's principal Christine emphasized the process aspect of coming to terms with results and accountability:

I think the bottom line is our school plan, the results statements. We set up in front of us 'This is what we need, this is what we need to focus on. Again, within a tight district culture, looking at board priorities, what is it we are going to do at Lincoln'. We then take parents, staff and students through a process to collect information, providing input on the indicators. How do we know we are going to achieve these results and what are the action plans, how are we going to get there and do we have the dollars to get there?

In emphasizing the necessity of reporting results to the various school "publics", Anne-Marie of Jordan High commented on how she thought that could be accomplished:

I think you have to develop a monitoring system and I think you have to have indicators that are measurable, that you are prepared to share with your publics. They understand something like the reduction of vandalism, they understand something like a third more of our kids are writing diploma exams. We can't say we are doing better because it doesn't mean a thing to them. So you have to collect statistics to prove that our school has improved.

Anne-Marie further elaborated on those "statistics" at Jordan:

For me the more students we can get to challenge the diploma examinations is a sign

> of school improvement because we're trying to improve their academic record. We have those figures from year to year and we have in fact increased the number of students writing diploma exams in five years by one third. The other documentation is the incidence of vandalism. In this school we have reduced vandalism from about thirty to forty thousand dollars a year to seven thousand dollars last year.

Valleyview's Aaron mused that in order for a school to be accountable for its results, it was imperative that the school be given the appropriate responsibility for achieving those results. He commented:

> I think to be really able to meet the needs of the public you're serving in your community, you've got to have more responsibility in terms of being able to assess and direct the educational program for your school than we once did.

Jordan High's assistant principal Marilyn expressed considerable concern about the various measurement indicators utilized in looking at whether or not schools have been successful. She elaborated on those concerns:

> If you're looking to measure us against achievement--no contest; attendance--no contest; retention--no contest. Any of those kind of academic endeavors that you look at with our kids, you'd say 'What is happening at Jordan High' and that 'There is nothing happening there'. Yet in fact, if you were to look at the growth factor of our students in attitude, in community work, in athletics, in all of those other things which I believe make a total person, then I think we would come out very outstanding but we don't have measures for that in education. And so if you were to look at the school in terms of the climate, in terms of the leadership, in terms of the amount of work, the amount of teacher dedication, you would find our people would come out way ahead, we just don't have measures for that. If you asked us if we were doing a good job, we'd say 'Definitely yes'. The negative point about school-based management and school improvement is that they put us all at a common starting point and measure us with the same stick to see how much we went up. There is no common measuring stick and that's the reality. I think what we have to look at a lot more than we do is whether or not the community is comfortable with what we're doing with the students, is the community comfortable with the school taking in all the students who come looking for admission. We have to get a better handle on what the expectation for schooling is. The reality is there is no measurement stick for measuring school improvement. We have all those little indicators which do not gel together. We do measure academic achievement but that's only one facet of school improvement.

Needs

Another emphasis throughout participants' comments was that of needs. Specifically, participants were of the opinion that "needs" had to drive what happened in the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Jordan High's Eric stated it this way:

> The vision of the administration, the teaching staff, everybody who is in the particular school has to recognize the needs of the students and the needs of the community. Those student and community needs must come together and hopefully students' chances of success will be enhanced through initiatives made at the school level to accommodate those needs.

Anne-Marie, principal of Jordan High, spoke of the role "needs" played in a decentralized system versus a centralized one:

> I've worked as a department head in a system that was highly centralized and I've obviously worked in a school-based management system. There is no doubt in my mind that you're able to better focus on the things that need to be done when you have the authority to make the difference as opposed to the other. The other is almost a wish list and you kind of hope that it will happen. In this case, you also have to take the responsibility after having decided to organize something in a certain way.

Christine, principal of Lincoln Elementary, also acknowledged the emphasis on needs in the school-based management and school improvement relationship:

> That's something which is definitely part of school-based management and school improvement--looking at the needs of the students, the needs of the staff. It'll definitely help with school improvement. We look at all of the needs and decide on what should be our priorities and go from there.

Participants discussed the very significant role that the school staff played in the recognition of the myriad needs present in a school. Valleyview's Ryan made reference to that role:

> The staff of the school is where the needs get identified, not some external agency such as a central office. I think we can see where the needs are, and we can start making plans on a year to year kind of basis or a five year plan so we can get to a

particular location. If we were having someone else making decisions, we couldn't do that kind of thing.

Also mentioned in participants' comments was the fact that each school was unique as far as its needs were concerned and the community, in which the school was located, was instrumental in helping to determine those needs. Eric at Jordan High observed:

> There are so many programs we are involved with in this school that are unique to the needs of this school and the community. They are different than the needs of another high school in another part of the city. So the needs we are meeting here are needs we, in consultation with the community, feel are best met through initiatives that we put in place.

Academic and Non-academic Aspects of School Improvement

Study participants, when describing how they perceived the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, took a holistic overview of what was meant by school improvement. This researcher suggests that narrowly viewing school improvement as academic achievement only is shortsighted. It is important to remember, as one participant so aptly stated, that academic achievement is but "one facet of school improvement".

Participants, without exception, considered improvement as having academic and non-academic aspects to it. As assistant principal Maxwell at Jordan High so emphatically stated:

> If you're talking about school as a seat of learning, as a seat of developing appropriate values, in all of the people who both work there and learn there, the people we're serving, any improvement plan that a school develops has got to take all of those things into consideration. We're not just number crunchers. It's one thing to have those bigger, better Math scores but if we've killed kids along the way, that's not very good. We've got to have a balanced approach to developing good academic scores because that's certainly one of the objectives of schooling. But we've got to have a place where our plan addresses appropriate behaviors and social dynamics. There's got to be a place, where people who are involved in the improvement, are also

a part of the plan.

That "balanced approach" was echoed in comments by Ryan from Valleyview Junior High:

> I believe that with school improvement you're talking about appropriate decisions being made to increase the effectiveness of the programs that are delivered to the student. When it hits anything that involves student learning, I guess we could use the phrase 'schooling'. That involves academic and serves one part of it. But whatever decisions are made at this school to improve, it has to include all phases or aspects of the student's life within the school.

Valleyview's principal Aaron eloquently shared a similar thought:

> School improvement from a very specific standpoint could be thought of in terms of improving achievement scores and academic development in the school. But that's a very narrow focus and I really think to get at that, you have to do more than just focus directly on it in any event. So school improvement to me in its broadest sense really means just improving the atmosphere in a school so that it becomes more conducive to students learning, growing and progressing in all aspects of their being.

Autonomy

The New Illustrated Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1992) defines autonomy as "having the condition of being a self-governing community or local group in a particular sphere such as in religion or in education" (p. 71). Having that autonomy and being able to direct the programs within one's respective school was mentioned by a number of participants to be instrumental in a successful relationship between school-based management and school improvement.

Jordan High's William talked about the relationship in terms of "having almost complete autonomy within the school with the exception of the curriculum demands from Alberta Education and receiving a block-funded grant from our central services and running your own school".

Jordan's Eric viewed autonomy as a major characteristic of that relationship and expressed a similar thought: "When dealing with the school-based management process, you've given the school the right to be a self-governing body and that is the characteristic that allows you to encourage or facilitate school improvement".

Similarly, Jordan High assistant principal Leo suggested that having control and being able to make your own decisions was crucial to the process:

> All decisions are left to a specific site. We have complete control over the budget once the allocation is made to the school. We have control over the staffing of the school, and for the most part, over the programs offered in the school.

Aaron, principal of Valleyview, suggested that as a result of having that autonomy, there was a positive attitude development in staff and a greater willingness to deal with any problems that might arise at the school level. He elaborated:

> I believe that positive attitude development in staff only comes when they can see some results of their wishes, desires, requests and involvement. I think you stand a good chance of being able to operationalize staff concerns and input. Instead of whenever staff raise an issue or a particular staff having to say 'Well, let's see what we can get the big boys downtown to do about this', you deal with it at the school level.

Lincoln teacher Corinne commented that this autonomy facilitated the periodic revision of decisions when deemed necessary. In her words:

> You sometimes make decisions about resources you need in the school by looking at Science results for example or if you've identified Science as a particular area for improvement, then you are able to allocate resources or change the way you're spending your money to bring about improvement in that area. The same thing with Language Arts--if the Language Arts results seem to be lower than you want, you can put your resources into that. Because you're able to adjust your staffing, you can make some pretty major changes that I don't think you'd be able to make if we weren't operating within this school-based management system. Rather than it being made at the district level, you're told how much money you have as a result of your enrollment, and you go from there. For example, if you have a high-need clientele, your emphasis might be on smaller classes.

The Importance of Strong Central Services to the Process

The last theme to emerge from this emphases category was the importance of strong central services to the process. Again, this was not a theme that received widespread attention from study participants. However, based on observations in the schools participating in the study, the researcher felt that it was significant enough to merit recognition.

Cognizant of the need for such services, Jordan High's principal Anne-Marie observed:

> I think that if the administration or leadership of the school is not properly inserviced and does not know where to go for assistance and does not have the courage to ask for help, you are going to run into trouble because you cannot be all things to all people. So, for example, if you take over the maintenance of the school which we have done here, you have to go for help. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues see that as a sign of weakness. The courage to ask for help is critical.

Lincoln Elementary's principal Christine also recognized the need for and the importance of these services:

> School-based management and school improvement would be very difficult to do without such strong central services behind you to support you. So in my work as principal and in our work at the school, whatever we need assistance with, it is only a phone call away to find out who we need or is this possible and those kind of things. I would be a little scared if I didn't have that central support. It could become unmanageable. For example, if I were to fill a position here, I can count on the names I get from our district office. Looking through a few files instead of possibly two hundred files (which I would have to do if we didn't have those central services) is certainly much more preferable. Take consulting services--in this school of x number of students, there is no way we can have every expertise in the building that we need. With consulting services, I can get that expertise quickly when I need it. And also the support for our secretary is there if she needs it. So that high service level from central services is extremely important.

Results

Results was the third category to emerge from the interview and researcher observation data. It was obvious that the participants had little difficulty in suggesting a number of results emanating from the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, and observations by the researcher confirmed those results. Those results were as follows:

- a holistic approach to school improvement;
- concrete improvements;
- creativity and initiative;
- wiser decisions;
- the potential for competition among schools and teachers.

This section discusses each theme with appropriate comments from study participants being cited.

A Holistic Approach to School Improvement

A common theme pervading participants' comments was that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement resulted in their respective schools adopting a holistic approach to school improvement. This approach allowed members of the school community to look at the overall or "big picture" of what was needed to improve the school. It facilitated members being able to look beyond their own particular classrooms or individual responsibilities and to consider the school as a whole. Teacher Peter at Lincoln Elementary summarized it thus:

> School-based management forces you to look at your school. You just don't go down into your classroom and operate and work from a bunch of rules that have been passed down. The process itself forces you to look at your overall school and where you're

> heading, where you've been and especially if you have a deficit, where you're going to make those cuts. This forces a staff as a whole to solve the problems of the school rather than just leave the problems for the administrator or someone else to solve. You look at it together. It forces an evaluation or reflection by the teachers in the school.

Wilson of Jordan High also talked about this overall approach to school improvement:

> Every person here in our faculty council presents his or her case for the needs of what is going on and so because of the fact that you're aware of the needs and aware of their particular programs and some of the idiosyncrasies of programs, you have a tendency of opening your eyes as to what is going on in the school. You are more aware and more cognizant of what the school does offer and of the needs. So there's always a situation 'Well, I can do without this year and if you focus in on this particular program, then the next year we can perhaps change our focus around and I can put into abeyance some of my ideas'. I think that kind of attitude has a general impact on the decision making and improvement of the school in total because we just don't focus in and have a competition of one department against the other. The more involvement you have with teachers in other areas, the better it is.

Mel, a teacher at Valleyview, stated that school improvement meant more than just an improvement in academics: "We see the results at this school with [students'] marks and the way they feel about the school, their self-esteem, and the rapport we have between the school and the parents".

Valleyview's principal Aaron noted that school improvement in his school "has occurred in almost every area". He further described the overall nature of those improvements:

> We have focused on personnel areas in given years, we have focused on programs, the establishment of the academic challenge program has been most successful, the adaptation program, the English as a Second Language program. We focused on co-curricular kinds of activities in given years, the peer support programs. Various things that were not functioning before that, we've brought on-line and once they were, they continued and continued very successfully. There is a long list of added programs and really approaches that we've adopted in the school that have resulted in school improvement.

Concrete Improvements

In their discussions, participants were quick to list various concrete improvements which, in their opinion, had resulted from the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. These improvements ranged from those of a strictly academic nature to those of a rather non-academic flavor. Laura at Lincoln Elementary described one recent improvement which happened during the researcher's first week at the school and one that the researcher had the opportunity to observe firsthand:

> We had a little more money than we had originally planned to have. We were having some problems with Math--big enrollments in a number of classes and trying to accommodate the various ability levels in those classes. We now had the flexibility to be able to hire a Math specialist. Our kids are taken out and they now work with the specialist. That leaves us time to work with the kids in smaller groups for Language Arts or whatever. Those are some of the things that have come about as a result of school-based management and school improvement.

Gerry at Jordan High stated that he had seen a number of school improvements over the years and according to him, "it has improved the school in general and it definitely has improved the quality of education that is taking place today". He specifically mentioned the introduction of Advanced Placement classes as one of those improvements.

Likewise, Ryan at Valleyview Junior High described his school's efforts in making improvements which were related directly to teaching and learning:

> This year we decided to take the two classes of grade seven's at the academic challenge level and put them into three learning groups. That was a decision we made. We felt that it would be in the best interest of the kids in this school and the type of personnel we had on staff. Again that was a decision we made and simply put it into a budget which is nothing more than a planning document.

Improvements also included major purchases such as computer technology. Lincoln Elementary's principal Christine expounded on her school's efforts in that area:

> Computers have always been a focus here but when I came in, I was hearing very much from the community that we need more computer technology. So we made the decision to amortize $45 000 worth of technology and not one question was asked and has been asked since that decision was made. It was a given and we needed to do that. That may not have been as easy to do in a centralized system.

Another improvement to Lincoln involved its ventilation system. Christine described this initiative:

> I'd heard for years and years that the staff had complained about the poor air quality in the building and were always told that nothing could be done because it was too expensive. We got some prices and said that if it was that important--kids, parents, and teachers were telling me it was that important--we would do it. $8 000 went into it just a couple of months ago and again, not a question was asked. Everyone was saying 'Thank God, something's finally been done!'.

Creativity and Initiative

A number of study participants made reference to creativity and initiative as being results of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. The characteristic of flexibility was discussed earlier as a descriptor of this relationship and it would seem that this flexibility has directly contributed to the nurturance of a certain creativity and initiative. Assistant principal Leo at Jordan High elaborated:

> I think school-based management and school improvement encourages creativity. It gives a good opportunity for a particular school to pursue interests that I don't think would be there under a different kind of system. It allows that creativity, that flexibility. It encourages the risktakers and when I say risk, I don't mean you're playing with kids' lives. These are very calculated risks. I think that's what I like about it.

Examples of this creativity and initiative at Jordan High included school-community partnerships with a local hospital and a local shopping mall. Also, efforts were on-going

to have an artists' guild located in the school. It was anticipated that this guild would work closely with the school's fine arts program.

Aaron, principal of Valleyview Junior High, touched on this initiative aspect when he commented that

> when decisions on programming, personnel, any component vital to the operation of the school is made, it's not made in terms of the school going to central office. The automatic reference is what we will do here, what is our decision going to be, how are we going to tackle this. It's not that we better get on the phone and see what they will let me do or what I have to do from central office. Our starting point is right here.

In the three schools that participated in this study, staffs showed considerable initiative in the planning of their own professional development days. Peter at Lincoln Elementary outlined his school's efforts in that regard and how the planning process facilitated such efforts:

> One year we spent time on the writing process. Then last year we worked on a Science theme where we spent time on the various four step method in Science to improve our efforts in the classroom. The fact is that the whole budgeting process involves not only dollars but also the planning which includes us picking our areas of emphasis or a focus that we want to work on in the next little while.

Anne-Marie, Jordan High's principal, described how her school created a program to help Grade 10 students, who were somewhat deficient in academic skills, to earn credits. She attributed this program to the initiative of her staff. Her words:

> We used to have a group of young students who hadn't completed their Grade 9. They were given an opportunity to earn credits. They were a terrible behavior problem for the school and, in fact, I think they gave the school a bad name. We sat down and decided to develop a program we call 'our pilot for success program' and now 80 percent of those young people earn credits in their first year. The rest are on a sort of incomplete program that they will earn in their second year. To me that's a sign that's made a tremendous impact on the school.

Anne-Marie was convinced that such initiatives helped to contribute to an improvement in community attitudes towards the school:

> There is not doubt about it--the community attitude towards us is remarkable. We can see that from sponsorships, to the way they're using our facility, to the comfort level coming into the school, to the personal comments we get. And to me that's a really nice kind of a thermometer.

Wiser Decisions

It was suggested by study participants that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement had resulted in wiser decisions. According to the various comments, these wiser decisions saved the school board "lots of money". Gerry from Jordan High elaborated at length:

> I think it has saved the board lots of money because I have seen some major mistakes when budgetary decisions were made outside the school itself and they were major mistakes. It's like any large corporation; the people who make these decisions weren't really in tune with what was happening. We have gone through many phases. Today, however, we don't seem to be going through as many different phases anymore. We can all think of different things--open classrooms for example. We had classrooms that were open rooms because those ideas originated in the [United] States and some guy at central office thought this was a great idea and all of a sudden, all the schools got them and nobody knew what to do with them. But now these things aren't taking place as quick anymore because the schools aren't buying such nonsense. I don't want to say that all of these ideas were nonsense but today they seem to be having a lot more thought of why they would make changes and if those changes were actually going to be beneficial to that particular school.

Teacher Ryan at Valleyview Junior High talked about "wise decisions" as "appropriate decisions that are made to increase the effectiveness of the programs that are delivered to the student". He further commented that "whatever decisions are made at this school to improve, they have to include all phases or aspects of student life within the school".

The Potential for Competition Among Schools and Teachers

Although it didn't receive major attention throughout participants' comments, there was some concern that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement had the potential to create competition among schools and among teachers within schools. Those participants who did comment on this were of the opinion that such competition, although not necessarily negative, might result in schools and teachers isolating themselves. The researcher felt that this concern was worthy of being mentioned.

Valleyview's principal Aaron had this to say about the competitive aspect:

> From a school system's standpoint something that tends to happen if we're not careful is that rather than a co-operative element within the system occurring, a competitive element can start to show where every school becomes an entity of its own. And in fact to tell you the truth, the world from an educational standpoint can start to begin and end at the doors of this school for me. I can jealously guard that and be reluctant to share with others some of the ideas and things that have worked for us because we're in competition for the same student. I think that's an area in general that has to be addressed and co-ordinated in any school system looking at this type of organization. When you decentralize a lot of authority and responsibility and decision making to the schools, they start to guard that very jealously.

Peter at Lincoln Elementary also referred to this competitiveness:

> With school-based management and school improvement comes a competition because schools are no longer as identical as they were before. They can move in different directions and in doing so, will become recognized for certain reasons. That results in students often attending that school more than others. I know that right now in our system there is the idea that the more students you are attracting to your school, the more successful you are. So it's introduced a little bit of this competition As a result, the schools are moving in different directions and some are perhaps more successful than others. I think there may be a danger in people in one area feeling that one school is not as good as a school in another area. I think that somewhere we should ensure that schools are perceived by the public to be equitable.

Assistant principal Marilyn at Jordan High indicated a similar concern:

> If there isn't somewhere some philosophy that makes me want to co-operate with others in the same store as me, if it truly becomes a competitive 'my school is better than your school' philosophy, then I think as a district we lose as well.

Marilyn further emphasized collaboration and co-operation with other schools as ways to ensure that this competitiveness didn't result in isolation:

> I believe in order to make good management decisions, I need the opportunity to talk to people that are making similar decisions. I don't believe we do that enough when we truly manage. Has to do with that double-edged sword of competition. So I'm trying to make my school the best it is for my students and you're trying to make your school the best for your own students. How do we still ensure that we share and co-operate so that we both jump up the notch instead of, in not sharing, we hold ourselves down. Again, that mechanism is sometimes there and sometimes you have to really push for it.

With respect to competition among teachers, Peter at Lincoln Elementary explained it this way:

> At times the process of coming to a decision may create among teachers a political atmosphere. I don't think that has been a problem in our school. But I could see it being a problem in some schools because it can create competition for resources. Teachers may try to influence either the principal or the staff to have money come their way for their specific department or subject.

Concerns

Concerns was the fourth category to emerge from a study of participants' comments. Specifically, these concerns had to do with the following:

- the time factor;
- curriculum development;
- compliance with collective agreements and district policies;
- major capital expenditures;
- a tendency to be preoccupied with management-type issues.

A discussion of these various concerns along with specific participant comments follows.

The Time Factor

Recurring throughout participants' comments was the concern that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement involved a considerable expenditure of time. This expenditure, according to the participants, was necessary in order for the process to work effectively. It was also questioned by some participants as to whether or not there was sufficient time in the working day of teachers to make that relationship work as well as it could. Laura at Lincoln Elementary clarified her thoughts on the issue of time:

> On other staffs I've been on, there have usually been fairly large groups of people on the budget committee. In many cases it was whole staff decisions and I would often think of the number of hours that we spent on the budget, hours that I feel I would much rather spend preparing, planning. So the time factor is something I have trouble with. It's great that we have the decision-making capability but it is so time-consuming especially when the budget has to go in and here we are sitting with thousands and millions of dollars and everything has to add up. But then again it really depends on staff. Perhaps with a small staff like this one it's not a problem. With a large staff and with so many people having input, it seems to take forever to make decisions. And I remember budget meetings going on for two or three hours at stretch. So time is definitely a concern.

Quoted earlier in this chapter (p. 82), Winston at Jordan High questioned whether or not teachers really had the time to be able to put into the process. In a similar vein, Wilson, also at Jordan High, wondered aloud as to whether or not the time expenditure was justified in terms of how much leeway the school really had with respect to the monies involved:

> I guess the biggest thing I see is the budget. We spend an awful lot of time and effort on the budget and when you have anywhere from 73 to 83 percent of your budget occupied by salaries, that gives you very very little flexibility as to what you are actually going to do and I think that you have to set your priorities with regards to what happens.

Glenda at Valleyview Junior High commented on the time factor with respect to the process involved in the hiring of a teacher this current school year:

> I think time is definitely one thing. It's a really big one because sometimes it comes down to a fine line about what decision you're going to make about where the money is going to go. This is particularly so when it comes to a big decision like the decision when we hired a full-time teacher this year. With that particular job, people would have liked to have had more input into actually what she was doing during her time because there may be some controversy about that down the road. I mean we hired this teacher but now as to which kids are benefiting, which kids should be benefiting, perhaps if we had more time, her time could be used more fairly.

Lincoln principal Christine spoke about the need for having more flexibility with regards to the time necessary for her staff to be able to do more collaborative work:

> I'd have more time for my staff to work together and that's a provincial issue. Give me more flexibility within the school calendar to make some changes--not just two professional development days and four non-instructional days per year. This flexibility would allow me to work with our community and our staff. I think that would be one thing I'd really like to do. Then again, the more intensive time we can have staff working together, sharing their expertise and not duplicating work one another may be doing sitting in side-by-side classrooms.

Curriculum Development

It was suggested by a number of participants that curriculum development was not receiving the appropriate attention in the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. This had to do with the fact that when the district made the transition to school-based management several years ago, it replaced its curriculum supervisors with area superintendents. Participants saw this change as impeding school improvement. William, a department head at Jordan High, elaborated at length on his specific concerns:

> I think one of the things that impedes school improvement is that school-based management has caused in our jurisdiction some real problems in curriculum design. When we had a very centralized curriculum department, schools could identify needs. For example, if there was a new Science 30 course coming in, the curriculum

> department could very quickly take five of the best Science teachers in the district and have them sit down and develop the support materials that would be needed for such a course. But what's happened is when we decentralized the money and had no central curriculum department, no school had enough money to take on that project by themselves. So we really lost the ability to be in the forefront of curriculum change. When a change comes from Alberta Education, we react to it within our schools. For example, you might have 13 Science 30 teachers in 13 schools making up the materials that may or may not be as good as the guy next to you. Whereas instead of being able to pull them together and say, for two weeks, have them go through the curriculum, devise what is needed, and then have those materials sent out to the schools. Even the poorest and weakest teachers would then have good materials. That's something we've lost. By not having a centralized curriculum department, we are reacting to curriculum change instead of being in the forefront of such change.

Compliance with Collective Agreements and District Policies

Having to comply with various employee collective agreements and district policies was perceived by participants as stifling the flexibility of the decision-making process, thereby further weakening individual school improvement initiatives. Ryan at Valleyview Junior High made reference to the effects of having to honor such agreements:

> Basically, when you're given school-based management, theoretically you're in charge. The school is in charge and the principal is put in charge. He is told that he has to get results. So it is up to him to put together a staff and the different kinds of things in the school to achieve those results. It becomes a little on the tough side when you're tied into contracts, contracts with the teachers' union, contracts with the custodians, contracts with the secretaries, all those collective agreements. They impact you in the sense that there might be a particular super individual you want on your staff, whether it be a secretary, custodian or a teacher. But according to the contract, you can't pick up that individual and you're given someone else for whatever reason. You might end up with a particular teacher who could do just a beautiful job but because of the contract, you get another person who has been bumped from another school. Those kind of decisions hurt. You end up needing a particular type of individual and you're given someone else, for whatever reason, who is then stuck on your staff. Sometimes it works out. Other times it can become a disaster.

Department head William at Jordan High described his frustration with the district's policy of a 30 to 1 student teacher ratio:

> We have a policy in this district that there should be no more than 30 students in a classroom and that's obviously restricted the principal's ability to staff. That doesn't make sense to me--in all honesty with a very good Mathematics teacher, a couple of monitors in a large room, and one teacher aide, I honestly think a good Math teacher could instruct 50 or 55 students in Math 30. Students at that level are very goal-oriented, they're there to learn and you don't have discipline problems. At the same time by putting 30 people in our lowest level stream of Mathematics--kids are there because they haven't learned Math, typically not because of perceptual problems but because of behavior problems, attendance problems or whatever else. By staffing them at 30 to 1, it becomes an absolute zoo. Learning is a minor to control. So it doesn't make sense that we have the same rules for the very academic kids that we have for the non-academic kids. And then again, there's another example of how we've created a rule that destroys the ability to try and teach 50 students in a room with monitors and an aide for very academic kids. It's created real problems for the people teaching in the second stream where they're dealing with behavior problems. Give us 50 kids in Math 30 and make it 15 to 1 in the lower levels.

Major Capital Expenditures

Another concern of study participants involved the expenditures of large amounts of money in undertaking major school projects such as roof replacement, boiler replacement, and the upgrading of facilities such as Industrial Arts and Art rooms. This was a particular concern of participants who were in older buildings which were fast approaching the point where major expenditures would soon have to be made to keep the building and its facilities up-to-date. School staffs were expected to plan for these major expenditures, a process which participants had no argument with. However, their concern was that the monies involved had to come out of their school budget and the bottom line was that this would obviously impact on various other aspects of a school's improvement plan. Participants felt that there should be special monies set aside by the school board for such purposes, especially in the case of older buildings in need of repair and refurbishment.

Jordan High's assistant principal Leo elaborated on this concern:

> A lot of our buildings are old, they were built in the mid-fifties, the boom era. They probably weren't built to a standard that would allow them to exist in perpetuity. They were built with a life expectancy of about 30 years. Right now a lot of those schools are in need of repair. With the money that is allocated to those schools, there isn't enough money for repair. So many of those schools are suffering right now and the district has to come to terms with that.

Teacher Pauline at Valleyview Junior High expressed a similar sentiment:

> If there's a big ticket item which has to be improved and it costs a lot of money, that money shouldn't come out of the regular school budget and we shouldn't be forced to go into debt because of it. Because when that money is pulled away, it's pulled away from students and the whole school is about students.

Olivia, a department head at Valleyview, also shared her concerns regarding major expenditures:

> One thing that comes to mind is audiovisual equipment. For instance, within your school-based budget, you have to budget and plan for replacement of equipment, upgrading of plant or whatever. It becomes a problem with a school built 30 years ago because there are a lot of changes that need to be made in the plant itself. Equipment needs to be updated and the central office doesn't allow for that. It has to be budgeted and can be carried over a number of years but those kinds of expenses are very very high. That's one area I think central office should be allocating for plant improvement. Perhaps have some type of a scale for older buildings whereby there is some type of rotating system every year for schools needing major work.

A Tendency to be Preoccupied with Management-type Issues

Some participants were of the opinion that in the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, there was a tendency to be preoccupied with management-type issues to the detriment of the perhaps more important professional issues ever present in today's schools. By "management-type issues" are meant school rules and regulations, student sanctions, school budgets and the like. Professional issues

include items dealing with instruction and learning in the classroom, student evaluation and curriculum development.

Teacher Vivian from Valleyview Junior High elaborated:

> We deal with management-type issues not professional issues. School improvement can be hindered because we spend so much time giving everybody the opportunity to make decisions about these management-type issues that I think could be decided by a smaller group of people because some people don't want to be involved in those decisions. I guess what I'm saying is that you should bring a group of professionals together to talk about organizing for instruction and how we can do things differently.

As alluded to earlier (pp. 83-84), finances and financial control could also tend to be a preoccupation. Participants saw the challenge as keeping that concern dealing with finances and financial control in perspective. Principal Aaron at Valleyview offered this caveat:

> If you're not careful, one of the things that can happen is that the dollars start to 'wag' so to speak--number one it takes time so that's one impeding thing; number two it takes time to monitor the money; it takes time to make good decisions, number three--you have to be careful to make sure the dollars don't 'wag'--like the tail doesn't wag the dog. It's very easy to slip into the trap of starting to look at people in terms of dollars. You don't look at a teacher as a teacher but as a $54 000 expenditure and you can start looking past some significant programming requirements. It's important not to just look at things in terms of dollars and cents and not to make all decisions in terms of those dollars and cents.

Summary

This chapter discussed the various categories and themes which emerged from the participant interview and researcher observation data (see Figure 5.1). Those categories were descriptors, emphases, results, and concerns. Themes elucidating each of these categories were also discussed and appropriate quotations from study participants were cited.

Figure 5.1

Summary of Emergent Categories and Themes

	C A T E G O R I E S			
	Descriptors	Emphases	Results	Concerns
	The notion of improvement as underlying motivation	Planning	A holistic approach to school improvement	The time factor
T	The amount of time involved	Professional development	Concrete improvements	Curriculum development
H	A preoccupation with funding and finances	Importance of the community	Creativity and initiative	Compliance with collective agreements & district policies
E	The immediacy and local nature of the decision-making process	Accountability and results	Wiser decisions	Major capital expenditures
M	Administrator dependence	Needs	The potential for competition among schools and teachers	A tendency to be preoccupied with management-type issues
E	Student focus	Academic and non-academic aspects of school improvement		
S	Meaningful involvement in the decision-making process	Autonomy		
	Flexibility	The importance of strong central services to the process.		
	A proactive nature			
	Trust			

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to examine teachers' and school administrators' perceptions with respect to the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Specifically, it was anticipated that this study would determine whether or not teachers and school administrators perceived school-based management to result in school improvement.

The study was directed by a general research question with several subsidiary research questions. Chapter 5 detailed and elaborated upon the categories and themes which emerged from the data gathered in response to those research questions. This chapter will discuss the specific findings of the study as guided by the research questions.

Subsidiary Research Questions

Do teachers and school administrators perceive school improvement to be a goal of school-based management?

Without exception, teachers and school administrators felt that school improvement was definitely a goal of school-based management. Several participants stated that they considered "school improvement" to be the underlying reason, or "original idea" as one teacher phrased it, for the Edmonton Public School District making the transition to school-based management back in 1976.

Many participants suggested that school improvement had to be a goal of school-based management because going through the process involved in school-based management

would be futile if it did not result in school improvement. An elementary school teacher explained it this way:

> I believe it would be the underlying goal of school-based management because if you are making decisions at the school level to achieve or get closer to your vision of your school, school improvement is always a part of that.

The junior high principal suggested that school improvement was what drove school-based management. In his words:

> School improvement is what drives school-based management. I look at maintenance as the opposite of improving. You're either maintaining or improving. Hopefully you don't plan to go the other way. But within the school-based management concept you may plan to maintain certain components in the school at a certain level. That's to allow you to focus in on priorities where you're going to try to improve. So in school-based management improvement is always there and is always a part of it, not necessarily improvement in every component of the operation, but in certain key ones in a given year.

An elementary teacher suggested that it was "logical" for school improvement to be a goal of school-based management:

> I believe school improvement is a goal of school-based management because every school has the power to make those kinds of decisions. It only follows and it seems logical that every school would want to be better than it was before. I think that it is definitely a goal.

The elementary principal shared a similar reasoning:

> I believe school improvement would be the underlying goal of school-based management because if you are making decisions at the school level to achieve or get closer to your vision of your school, school improvement is always a part of that. And why would we want to give decision-making capability to a school in comparison to them all being made for you unless the school would be able to move ahead. So definitely, school improvement would be a goal.

The literature on school-based management appears to be sending mixed messages when it comes to articulating the goals of this form of school governance. Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) have questioned the effectiveness of school-based management and in

doing so, attributed this deficiency in effectiveness partly to a "lack of goal consensus" (p. 182). When one examines what various writers have stated as goals for making the transition to school-based management, there seems to be a certain legitimacy to their claim.

Brown (1991) suggested that districts made the transition to school-based management for three reasons: (a) to promote school flexibility in decision making; (b) to increase school accountability; and (c) to increase school productivity (p. 23). Cawelti (1989) stated that school-based management should improve accountability and productivity in the schools (p. 46). Herman and Herman (1993) discussed school-based management in terms of its being a vehicle for achieving both a rethinking of the structure of the school site and a focus on professionalization (p. 243). These specific examples indirectly referred to school improvement. However, such ambiguity leads to confusion on the part of school administrators and teachers in their efforts to introduce school-based management into their schools.

In this study there was a very clear consensus among the participants that school improvement was a goal of school-based management. This finding tends to contradict what Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) have stated with respect to the "lack of goal consensus" (p. 182).

Having had ample opportunity to observe various school improvement initiatives in action, and to dialogue with teachers and school administrators regarding this whole issue of whether or not school improvement is indeed a goal of school-based management, the researcher has to agree with the study participants. The comment made by a couple of participants suggested that it was only logical for school improvement to be a goal of

school-based management. Another comment implied the futility and perhaps the foolishness of school-based management if it were not being done for improvement purposes. The researcher considers these points extremely valid ones. Why should teachers and school administrators engage in a process which everyone recognizes as "labor-intensive" unless it translated into the improvement of schools for all its stakeholders--students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community at large.

The fact that the educational community has not been able to come to a consensus regarding this question of whether or not school improvement is a goal of school-based management has obviously contributed to the present state of confusion. Further adding to this confusion is a debate currently being waged over what is meant by school improvement. There are those among us who consider school improvement to be related to academics only--the improvement of test scores. There does appear to be a consensus in the literature that school improvement is a much more holistic process concerned with all aspects of schooling, not the least of which is academic achievement. Comments from the various participants were very much in congruence with the literature.

In summary, teachers and school administrators at the three schools appeared to be unanimous in their comments regarding school improvement being a goal of school-based management. The researcher was left with the impression that although the two terms, school-based management and school improvement, were not totally synonymous, they were in fact greatly inter-related.

What school improvement results, if any, do teachers and school administrators perceive occurring from the implementation of school-based management?

Teachers and school administrators felt that their schools had experienced and were experiencing a number of school improvements as a result of their operating under a school-based management model. These improvements ranged all the way from improvement of the physical plant to improvements in the teaching and learning situation in the classroom. Various examples of those improvements in each school along with comments from individual teachers are provided in this section.

Lincoln Elementary School

In their interviews the teachers and principal from Lincoln talked about several examples of school improvement which they perceived had occurred as a result of their school operating under school-based management. A number of those examples are listed below:

- the hiring of a Math specialist to alleviate large class problems in Math classes in grades three and four;
- physical improvement to the building's ventilation system by adding several windows to a number of classrooms;
- a beautification program resulting in plants, park benches, carpeting, and murals being added to the inside of the school to encourage a "warm and friendly atmosphere" for students, teachers, and visitors;
- professional growth of staff as a result of various professional development initiatives taken by individual teachers and the principal;

- introduction of a computer technology network into the school; as a part of that initiative, each teacher on staff received a laptop computer (on loan to the teacher for that school year) and the majority of teacher and principal memos were done by electronic mail (e-mail); this encouraged teachers to become proficient in the use of computers thus facilitating their efforts in introducing students to the world of computer technology;
- introduction of an accelerated program for academic challenge students in Grade 6;
- an emphasis on meaningful teacher involvement in the decision-making process; the distribution of regular newsletters and meetings was one way of facilitating that involvement.

As earlier noted in Chapter 5 (pp. 108-109), school improvement was perceived to be holistic in nature and not only isolated to academic achievement. As one teacher stated, academic achievement was only " part of it". However, the researcher inferred from teachers that they considered all of these specific initiatives to contribute directly or indirectly to academic achievement.

Valleyview Junior High School

In like fashion, the teachers and principal at Valleyview Junior High School experienced no difficulty in being able to describe what they perceived to be school improvements as a result of their school operating along school-based management principles. A partial list of those improvements is as follows:

- the meaningful involvement of students, parents, teachers, and the community in the decision-making process;

- the development of a positive attitude in staff resulting from their meaningful involvement in the decision-making process;
- the meaningful involvement of teachers in the hiring process which resulted in a teacher being hired this current school year to work with students experiencing academic difficulties;
- the introduction of an academic challenge program designed to cater to the needs of gifted students;
- the introduction of computer technology which involved the purchase of several personal computers and the re-assignment of one of the teachers to take responsibility for this technology in the school and also for inservicing the staff in this technology;
- physical upgrading and refurbishment of the Home Economics and Art rooms,
- physical upgrading and refurbishment of the staff lounge;
- the existence of a very warm, friendly, student-centered school resulting from many of the above-listed improvements;

The teachers and the principal at Valleyview, as did the teachers and administration at Lincoln, were of the opinion that school improvement was multi-faceted. The above improvements range from efforts designed to directly impact on student achievement to those which would deal indirectly with that aspect of school life. As one teacher so aptly stated, "whatever decisions are made at this school to improve, they have to include all phases or aspects of the student's life within the school".

Jordan High School

Teachers and school administrators at Jordan High responded in much the same way regarding the various school improvements that they perceived resulting from the implementation of school-based management. Again, those improvements ranged from those of a non-academic nature to those more directly related to academics. Those improvements included:

- meaningful involvement on the part of staff, parents, students, and the community in the decision-making process;
- upgrading and refurbishment of the general and administrative offices;
- the establishment of several school-community partnerships;
- meaningful involvement of department heads in the hiring process;
- significant improvement in the Math 30 diploma results;
- significant reduction in costs incurred by incidents of vandalism in the school;
- significant increase in the number of students writing Alberta Education diploma exams;
- the ability of the school to decide its "hiring mix"--that is, the number of teachers, teacher aides, and other support personnel;
- upgrading of computer technology in the Industrial Arts and Business Education departments;
- the maintenance and cleanliness of the school.

Teachers and school administrators implied that these specific improvements were greatly facilitated by the existence of school-based management. Although the

improvements listed at the three schools each had their individual idiosyncrasies, they were very similar in nature. These improvements ranged from physical improvements in the school buildings to actual improvements in the teaching and learning process.

This wide assortment of various school improvement results is consistent with similar results as reported in the literature on school-based management. Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) listed staff development, skills development through workshops, exposure to new curriculum and pedagogy, the introduction of computer technology as an instructional aid, and high involvement among its stakeholders (pp. 274-286) as examples of various school improvements currently happening in schools operated according to school-based management practices.

The school improvements listed by teachers and school administrators were also consistent with what this researcher had anticipated those results to be. Rather surprising however, were the similarities between the initiatives taken at each of the schools even though they were at three different groups of grade levels. Such similarity might reinforce the thinking that school improvement is holistic in nature and process-oriented. Consequently, one might expect to see similarities at the different grade levels in the actual initiatives being undertaken.

Another point worthy of note is that the researcher was very impressed with the energy exerted by teachers and school administrators in operationalizing the variety of initiatives and ensuring that these initiatives would make a positive difference to the students. That student focus was particularly gratifying to observe.

What differences, if any, exist between what teachers and school administrators perceived those results to be?

Upon first examining the comments in response to this question, there did not appear to be any significant differences between what teachers and school administrators considered those school improvements results to be. There were very few differences in the various examples of school improvement listed by both groups. However, upon closer examination, there did appear to be some slight nuances in how administrators talked about those improvements as compared to the teacher comments.

When administrators spoke about school improvement and school-based management, they appeared to be more concerned, than teachers, that the goals, objectives, and priorities articulated in the planning process be linked to the goals, objectives, and priorities of the school district. The comments by the principal of Lincoln Elementary warrant repeating here because they illustrate how the administrators spoke about school improvement and its connection to the school district's overall plan:

> We have such a strong district culture in Edmonton Public, that these are our beliefs, this is what we are wanting to achieve. We have our board priorities. Everything we decide to do at the school level, because we believe it will help improve what we're hoping to accomplish, is tied in with that district culture.

There seemed to be a greater allegiance or loyalty to the school district on the part of school administrators than was evident from teachers. That allegiance or loyalty appeared to be reaffirmed when Jordan High's principal commented that "the school board sets the priorities" and taking those priorities into consideration was "very much part of our process for planning each year".

In contrast, teachers appeared to desire even greater autonomy than was presently being exercised by their schools. In a couple of instances, they implied a certain resentment towards being tied into the school district as far as goals, objectives and priorities were concerned. The following comments by a department head at Jordan High appeared to exemplify both that resentment and that desire for greater autonomy:

> It seems that every year our district puts more and more parameters and restrictions upon decisions the principal and business people can make. They have to have a staffing ratio of 1 to 30, they have to have so many custodians per square foot or 100 square feet of building or whatever. Their parameters within which decisions can be made seem to be restricted more and more each year.

A teacher at Jordan High expressed similar sentiments especially as they related to the power of the area superintendent:

> I would say take away some of the authority given to the area superintendent and put more of this authority closer to where the decisions are really understood and made, and that would be to the principal. That's easier said than done but if this system is going to work, then the closer that you can get to decisions being made to where the effect is felt, the more successful it will be.

It is interesting to note that in the months since this study was conducted, the Edmonton Public School District under its new chief superintendent, Emery Dosdall, has decided to eliminate these six area superintendent positions as of the beginning of the 1995-1996 school year. These positions are being replaced by three co-ordinating principals for the next three years. After this initial three year period, it is the researcher's understanding that these positions will also be eliminated. The researcher is unaware of the reasoning behind these cutbacks but would conjecture that these measures are consistent with the current political climate of downsizing and restructuring very much in vogue in the province of Alberta. Apart from the downsizing and restructuring activity presently underway especially in the field of education, this elimination of area

superintendents, for whatever reasons, certainly adds some legitimacy to the Jordan High teacher's comments above.

The researcher is reminded of the comment made by the principal of Valleyview Junior High that was quoted in Chapter 5 (p. 114) and which also warrants repeating here: "When you decentralize a lot of authority and responsibility and decision making to the school, they start to guard that very jealously". It seems that this is very true indeed.

The researcher was not surprised by this dichotomy with respect to the perceptual differences between how the school administrators and the teachers saw their school's connection with the school district. The researcher's experience is that, generally speaking, teachers don't identify to any great degree with their employing school districts. In fact, one could even say that there often exists an animosity on the part of teachers towards what the school district is attempting to accomplish. This doesn't make a great deal of sense because schools and the school district should be on the same wave length regarding goals, objectives, and priorities. However, very often, those goals, objectives, and priorities are poorly articulated from the district perspective and teachers, because of their isolation from the school district (due to being in the classroom most of the time with their students), don't usually get the opportunity to work with senior district personnel in the same way that school administrators would. Because of that closer working relationship, school administrators tend to have a greater understanding of and be more receptive to what the school district is all about. Hence, they seem to buy into what the district is trying to accomplish. Whereas, teachers being relatively isolated from the school district tend to want to be more independent from the district.

In summary, teachers and school administrators perceived no differences in the school improvement results emanating from the implementation of school-based management. However, there were differences in how these two groups couched their comments about those school improvement results. School administrators appeared to show greater loyalty and allegiance to the school district with regards to their individual school improvement plans fitting into the district priorities, goals and objectives. Teachers, on the other hand, tended to be desirous of a greater autonomy and independence from the district in developing their own school improvement initiatives.

What features or characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as encouraging or facilitating school improvement?

Teachers and school administrators listed several features or characteristics of school-based management that encouraged or facilitated school improvement. These features or characteristics were:

- the opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process;
- the school being an autonomous unit;
- the immediacy and local nature of the decision-making process;
- the flexibility of stakeholders in the decision-making process;
- the planning process;
- the open and democratic nature of the decision-making process.

A discussion on each of these characteristics follows.

The opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process

Consistently mentioned throughout participants' comments was the point that all stakeholders had the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process if they so desired. The emphasis was on "the opportunity for involvement" and a teacher at Valleyview Junior High made that very clear:

> We're all involved to the degree that we want to be and quite frankly there are some teachers who don't want to be involved but that's their choice. In that case, they have to go along with what the rest of us have made decisions on.

This finding is congruent with a conclusion reached by Alexandruk (1985) which stated that staff involvement was perceived by both principals and teachers in the Edmonton Public School District to be a positive development as a result of the implementation of school-based management.

The school being an autonomous unit

In school-based management, because authority and power have been devolved to the school site, the school, for the most part, exists as an autonomous unit. This was suggested by study participants to be a major characteristic of school-based management in encouraging school improvement. One of the participants at Jordan High put it very bluntly when he averred that "you've given the school the right to be a self-governing body and that is the characteristic that allows you to encourage or facilitate school improvement".

One of the areas where autonomy would play a major role would be in the expenditure of monies allocated to the school by the district. Although not all school improvement initiatives require the expenditure of large amounts of money, the majority of them do necessitate an outlay of dollars. When operating under school-based

management, schools receive block funding and have complete autonomy in deciding how those funds will be spent. Study participants felt that this characteristic definitely encouraged and facilitated school improvement.

The immediacy and local nature of the decision-making process

In schools operated according to school-based management practices, members of the school community--teachers, support staff, students, parents, and members of the community within which the school operates--are typically involved in the decision-making process. This involvement is achieved by formal individual and group meetings, formal surveys, and informal group and individual discussions.

The local nature of the decision-making process refers to the decisions being made within the school and by those individuals who are affected most by those decisions. The consensus of study participants was that the school should be the place for any decision making that affects the school and its members. A teacher at Lincoln Elementary felt that because "the teaching and learning are being done at the school, the decision making should be done at the school as well".

The immediacy of the decision-making process means that the decisions can be made fairly quickly with a minimum of delay which is quite a contrast to a centralized approach whereby a considerable amount of time may pass before decisions are made. Staffs perceiving a problem in their schools can move expeditiously to deal with that problem.

A Valleyview Junior High teacher summarized the sentiments of study participants when he commented that:

> Basically we can make decisions based on what we perceive the need to be and that there is a need. Then we can make that adjustment. We don't have to run and ask somebody for some money or for some changes in teacher population or changes

in full-time equivalents. We can make the changes here.

The flexibility of stakeholders in the decision-making process

Although there is an expectation on the part of the Edmonton Public School District that schools integrate their goals, objectives, and priorities into those of the district, schools have considerable flexibility in developing their school plans for improvement. This flexibility was listed by several participants as another characteristic of school-based management which facilitated school improvement.

A teacher at Lincoln Elementary perceived this flexibility as

> a good thing because every school, depending on where you are in the city, is so different. Whereas we may be focusing on technology, maybe in an inner city school, their money may be used somewhere else. That may not be their priority right now. I think it is important to allow schools this flexibility and let them choose what will most benefit their students.

An assistant principal at Jordan High reiterated the importance of that flexibility to the process:

> You've been given the finances, the leeway again to make decisions on your own. There's the flexibility, there's the opportunity and the school priorities are set with input from the staff, the students, the parents, and I can say also that the community is involved. I know in other situations where you don't have school-based management, that flexibility is not there.

The planning process

According to Herman and Herman (1993), planning is a major component of school-based management. Teachers and school administrators concurred with that assessment and throughout their comments consistently emphasized its importance. With respect to the role of planning in school-based management, Kaufman (cited in Bailey, 1991) stated that:

> Planning should aid the school in seeing the holistic picture. It does not serve the

> school to plan minute details and serve individual needs. Focusing on the holistic and collaborative efforts is the real place for planning. It is planning that should provide a global view, not a continuing narrow, convergent view of a few people. (p. 101)

"Seeing the holistic picture" which allowed teachers to focus on various needs within their school was very evident in the three schools participating in the study. This process forced teachers and school administrators to consciously examine the needs of their school and to work out a strategy for trying to accommodate those needs.

Although this planning process tended to revolve around the budget, Lincoln Elementary's principal suggested that perhaps it was more appropriate to refer to the process as a "school planning" exercise rather than the "budget planning process". She stated that this "budget planning process" may be "equated to dollars" only and "although that was a part of it, [it was] a part which came last, after the planning process had been completed".

The open and democratic nature of the decision-making process

The intent of school-based management is to bring decision making down to the level responsible for implementing those decisions and is achieved ideally through the open and democratic nature of the decision-making process (Herman & Herman, 1993). Although this characteristic is somewhat contingent on administrative leadership style, study participants were emphatic in stating the importance of this characteristic in facilitating school improvement. A teacher at Valleyview Junior High shared her thoughts on this characteristic and how it was operationalized in her school:

> I think in our school there's a feeling that you can really speak up and when it's appropriate, we might vote on it and it's done fairly. Nothing is done behind our backs as far as the principal being in his office making decisions and then telling us. What often happens is that a subcommittee is formed and that subcommittee takes the

> general consensus because otherwise you're in a staff meeting too long. A decision is then made based on what the whole group wants. And the fact that people listen to you and realize that you, as the teacher, have more knowledge about what you need than administrators who should be just facilitating your job really.

A teacher at Lincoln Elementary expressed a similar sentiment:

> Since we do have the power to make decisions, I have never felt that decisions are made unilaterally by one person or perhaps by one or two or three people getting together and deciding. It's always brought to the staff as a general thing and we always have a chance for input.

Teachers and school administrators listed six features of school-based management which they perceived as encouraging or facilitating school improvement. The researcher considers these six features to be practical, realistic and comprehensive. Although these features in and of themselves do not cause school improvement, they create the conditions which, when combined with a proactive approach by teachers and school administrators, lead to school improvement.

Based on actual observations, it was very clear to the researcher that the study participants were experiencing most, if not all, of these features in their day-to-day work in the schools. This begs the question as to whether or not all of these features are absolutely essential in order for school improvement to happen. Further reflection on this matter might suggest that these features act in concert with each other to create the optimal conditions for school improvement. The absence of one or several of these features would seem to retard the pace and degree of improvement actually happening in the schools. That is not to say that school improvement would cease. Rather, it could become a much slower and perhaps more tedious process.

What features or characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as impeding or hindering school improvement?

In addition to participants listing those features of school-based management which encouraged school improvement, they were able to also list several features they perceived as impeding school improvement. Those features were:

- the time commitment on the part of teachers and school administrators;
- an overdependence on the leadership style of the principal;
- adherence to collective agreements and district policies;
- the lack of a centralized curriculum department;
- the linkage of school goals, objectives, and priorities to those of the school district;
- the lack of a comprehensive system of measuring school improvement;
- a preoccupation with management-type issues.

This section expounds on each of these features and cites appropriate participant comments.

The time commitment on the part of teachers and school administrators

Permeating participant comments was the reference to the amount of time necessary to a positive relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Teachers were very quick to point out the amount of time that was required and appeared, at times, to be rather negative and resentful of that time commitment. They suggested that the time they were involved in making the school-based management and school improvement process work actually diverted them from what they considered to be perhaps a better use of their individual time--planning for their work with students in the classroom. There appeared to be a gap or void with some teachers in their being able to

see the direct link between the process and how it impacted on their work in the classroom. A teacher at Lincoln Elementary expressed her concerns in that regard:

> We end up meeting time after time and in a way I ask myself after going through the process, what impact did I have. I was one of several people working on this. And yet I know that all of this work we use to determine how we utilize our finances--I've had trouble finding the connection. It's partially my fault I guess. I haven't really taken the time to delve into it and try to learn more about it. With so many other things to do, it's pretty low on my priority list. In the spring of the year we meet several times, probably about 12 or 13 times. It may not be exactly that number but it feels like that. After a while, I don't want to do it anymore. I'm not sure how to streamline this process. My main difficulty, as I said earlier, is the connection between the process and the finances.

Although most teachers were less emphatic than the above regarding the issue of time, it was expressed as a negative of school-based management with respect to school improvement. Teachers questioned whether or not there was enough time in the day for them to do justice to the relationship. Administrators did speak to the concern that the time commitment might impede school improvement. However, they were of the opinion that the time commitment was absolutely essential to the process and that the process could not work if that time commitment was not there.

Although this concern regarding time commitment is one that is mentioned in much of the literature on school-based management (e.g., Alexandruk, 1985; Brown, 1990; Levin, 1992; Lange, 1991; Sawchuk, 1991), there is indeed a dearth of practical solutions to deal with this concern. A study by Herman and Herman (1993) of school-based management in Kentucky concluded that the time requirement was a definite weakness of school-based management. Apart from this acknowledgment of the concern and a statement to the effect that more resources were needed, including that of time, there were no viable solutions put forth to address the issue.

Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) did, however, offer some very sound advice with respect to this whole issue of time:

> Rather than set up elaborate participative mechanisms for entire staffs to have input into management decisions . . . schools may better concentrate on having key representative groups create the policy and directional context; establishing participative work-delivery structures that make teaching and learning decisions; and developing accountability systems so that managerial decisions, whether made by a single principal or by an executive committee, are responsive to the needs of the various constituencies. A more clearly defined division of decision-making authority may be a better application of scarce resources. (p 283)

From the various comments made by participants, it would seem that these "key representative groups" were already being utilized in the three schools that participated in the study. It would appear that they did not alleviate pressures on teachers and school administrators with respect to time commitment.

An overdependence on the leadership style of the principal

Authors of writings in educational administration have consistently emphasized the importance of the principal and the principal's leadership style in the school (e.g., Barth, 1990; Edmonds, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1995). In summarizing her case studies of four successful middle schools, Lipsitz (cited in Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 151) reached several conclusions about principal leadership. Three of those conclusions are listed below:

- In every case a principal . . . took hold of the possible for definition and proclaimed it within the school and throughout the community. Each school became special.
- Each of the four schools has or has had a principal with a driving vision who imbues decisions and practices with meaning, placing powerful emphasis on why things are done as well as how. Decisions are not made just because they are practical but for reasons of principle.

- Through their vision and practicality they articulate for their schools . . . a collective ideology that defines an organization's identity and purposes. The principals make these schools coherent, binding philosophy to goals, goals to programs, and programs to practices.

Conclusions like those above serve to illustrate the general dependence of a school and its staff on the principal. Teachers who were interviewed in this study stated quite clearly that in order for the relationship between school-based management and school improvement to be a successful one, it was imperative that the school principal be a very strong, capable, and dedicated leader. They further suggested that there was indeed an overdependence on the principal and the principal's leadership style.

A teacher at Lincoln Elementary articulated her concerns regarding that overdependence on the principal:

> When you're turning that much of the decision making over to the school, a lot depends on the kind of principal you have and the philosophy of the principal. I've been lucky where I've been working but there's a danger that you might not have that balanced view you need from a principal and that could cause a problem. So much depends on the quality of not only your administration but the staff as well and if you have a weak administrator, then there's the danger that there are a few powerful staff members who have much more of an effect, much more to do with the things that are happening than they should.

Another teacher at Lincoln expressed a similar point regarding this dependence on the principal:

> I think the biggest thing about school-based management falls on your principal. You need a very strong, knowledgeable principal because ultimately it is the principal who makes the final decision. If you have a good principal, that principal will listen to all the staff but ultimately the principal is the one who decides what the school needs.

A member of Jordan High's teaching staff reinforced what the above two teachers had to say about this principal dependence:

> There is a real dependence on the principal and on the leadership of a particular school. If you have a good principal and a good administrative team, if you have a person who is aware of all the in's and out's, all the innuendoes and subleties of the school-based management plan, then you're going to have a school that is well-informed. If you have someone who is doubtful or dubious, or who doesn't want that or who can't delegate that authority, then you're not going to have a successful school.

This finding is also congruent with the writings on school-based management. According to Herman and Herman (1993), the school-based management literature is consistent in describing the school principal as the "key player in the decentralization and restructuring process" (p. 92). They further elaborated on the personal characteristics of the principal which they considered essential for being effective in decentralized schools (Herman & Herman, 1993):

> Personal power and empowerment were persistent terms. . . . Principals in a restructured environment use these skills as they facilitate shared decision making through consensus building and through sheer expertise in communications and coalition-building. The more managerial and traditional dimensions of the role must be maintained or delegated as the leader becomes the facilitator of teachers in a redefined leadership role. (p. 92)

Louis and Smith (1991) concluded that principals were central in defining the vision and values of schools operated according to school-based management practices and also that there was an expectation for them to make school-based management work.

<u>Adherence to collective agreements and district policies</u>

Participants in the study suggested that having to adhere to collective agreements and district policies very often stifled a school's efforts in school improvement. This mostly referred to having to hire teachers who were declared surplus in other schools and having to honor a board policy requiring schools to maintain a 30 to 1 student-teacher ratio.

A department head at Jordan High expressed considerable frustration in discussing his concerns regarding a school under school-based management having to honor district policies. Quoted in Chapter 5 (p. 119), he pointed out that in a subject area such as Math, schools should not have to treat all students the same as far as the student-teacher ratio was concerned. He suggested that for courses such as Math 30 and Math 31 teachers would be able to teach large groups of students with the assistance of a teacher aide. This would facilitate better instruction in smaller classes of Math 13, Math 23, and Math 33 where students typically experienced difficulties with the material covered in those courses. That department head perceived having to adhere to such district policies as a deterrent to developing innovative strategies to further improve the teaching and learning situation in the classroom.

Another participant, also quoted at length in Chapter 5 (p. 118), reiterated the same concern with respect to the hiring of school personnel. In addition to teachers, he made reference to custodians, secretaries and other support staff. He suggested that having to hire staff because of collective agreement contracts sometimes worked out but often it didn't.

The literature on this particular factor is somewhat muted. Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) have postulated that "the fact that schools do not have unlimited authority is not in and of itself a barrier to improving schools" (p. 169). They go on to comment:

> Even the most extreme form of site-based control--charter schools--are constrained by charters that may require adherence to state or national law. On the other hand, there may be what Ogawa and White refer to as a 'web of constraints' that creates a sense of impotence and skepticism. When it constrains a school's ability to deliver educational services or to adapt teaching and learning to its student body, this web can be stifling. (p. 170)

The lack of a centralized curriculum department

The lack of a central curriculum department in a decentralized system was also mentioned by study participants to be an impediment or hindrance to school improvement especially as it related to classroom instruction. A teacher at Valleyview Junior High bemoaned the loss of curriculum supervisors and the appointment of area superintendents when the district made the transition to school-based management. It was his opinion that this loss resulted in a downplaying of the importance of curriculum resulting in what he described as a "[loss] of cohesiveness through the system".

A department head at Jordan High reiterated a similar concern regarding the development of new courses. He pointed out that under a central curriculum department, teachers from various schools who possessed an expertise in that specific subject area would be seconded from their positions for short periods of time to develop support materials for those new courses. Now, because there was no central curriculum department, there was a lack of leadership in taking such initiatives. Individual schools, realizing of course that those expenses would come directly out of their own budgets, were reluctant to go that route alone because of the prohibitive costs involved. This department head stated that schools were now forced to be reactive to curriculum change and development as opposed to taking a proactive, leadership role.

Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) stated that "school-based management programs use different strategies in curriculum and instruction, ranging from district control of curriculum to almost complete autonomy for school-level personnel" (p. 63). In Cleveland and San Diego, for example, curriculum remained a district responsibility; teams of teachers work with administrators to develop district-wide curriculum, while schools

make budget and personnel decisions based in part, on their plans to implement that curriculum (Clune & White, 1988). In the Chicago program, curriculum is developed at the school level by teachers and adopted by school councils; curriculum decisions are monitored by the board of education and the district administration (Moore, 1991).

The linkage of school goals, objectives, and priorities to those of the school district

Although the linkage of school goals, objectives, and priorities to the school district was not perceived by school administrators to be a feature of school-based management that impeded school improvement, it received significant enough attention from teachers to warrant mentioning here. A department head at Jordan High expressed the concern that there was an ongoing erosion of the school's independence and autonomy with respect to decision-making capabilities. He suggested that the school district, because of various policies and operating procedures, was imposing more and more restrictions in decision making on personnel, especially those involved in the administration and business aspects of the school operation.

Another teacher at the same school questioned the authority and power of the area superintendent with regard to school decisions. This teacher suggested that such authority and power should be downloaded to the school principal because as he stated, "the closer that you can get to decisions being made to where the effect is felt, the more successful it will be".

The underlying issue in these and similar participant comments is one of decentralization of power. School-based management focuses heavily on this

decentralization of power--moving authority from the top to the bottom of the system. Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) offered the following, perhaps realistic but somewhat philosophical, observation:

> We see a different, more promising relationship emerging between schools and the district. It is a two-way relationship of mutual influence that achieves a workable balance between autonomy and regulation, one that promotes invention and community at the school level while ensuring equity and efficiency at the district level. (p. 133)

The lack of a comprehensive system of measuring school improvement

The lack of a comprehensive system of measuring school improvement did not receive widespread attention in participants' comments. However, in the researcher's opinion, it was a credible point and one worthy of some discussion.

An assistant principal at Jordan High expressed the concern that there was no measuring system which accommodated both the academic and non-academic aspects of school improvement discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 102). It was her opinion that at the present time academics received all the attention and that, this was not fair to those schools such as hers which emphasized non-academics as well.

This concern speaks to the issue being currently looked at by several school-based management jurisdictions--that of accountability and performance measurement. These two areas in particular have been problematic to the concept of school-based management and lie at the core of the primary criticism regarding its acceptance and implementation. Critics of school-based management continually point to the lack of empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness (e.g., Clune & White, 1989; Levin, 1992; Mauriel & Lindquist, 1989; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Smyth, 1993). The development of

appropriate accountability and performance measurement systems is deemed critical by this researcher if school-based management is to be given the credibility and respect that it deserves.

Herman and Herman (1993) offered some advice for what needs to be done in order to address this issue:

- emphasis must be placed on outcomes rather than on resources and processes;
- there needs to be a greater emphasis towards data collection and the evaluation of objectives;
- changes instigated as a result of schools converting to school-based management must be measured for their effectiveness and efficiency.

Unfortunately, these writers fall short in recommending specific strategies that practitioners would be able to utilize in order to accomplish these objectives.

Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) provided these insights and some optimism with respect to certain shortcomings related to the accountability and performance measurement aspects of school-based management:

> We believe [education's underdeveloped accountability system] is a major factor impeding the effectiveness of school-based management. Part of the problem is an absence of goal consensus. Another factor is the failure of educational systems to collect and track information pertinent to making tradeoffs about resource use, and to methods of teaching, learning, and governance. . . . Many school-based management districts and schools are now in the process of setting goals and creating systems for disseminating information and measuring performance. When these pieces are in place and accountability is introduced, it is far more likely that school-based management will lead schools to focus on educational outcomes. (p. 182)

A preoccupation with management-type issues

Another characteristic of school-based management which participants acknowledged as an impediment to school improvement was a preoccupation with management-type issues. The specific issue mentioned several times centered around that of finances and the budget.

Several teachers had mentioned the amount of time taken up with discussing monies and the budget. Valleyview's principal did acknowledge the inherent danger in school-based management of devoting all one's time in ensuring that the finances were under control and that a balanced budget was achieved by the end of the school year. He suggested that administrators had to guard against falling into that kind of trap.

On the other extreme, references were made to situations where schools were left with large budget deficits and school staffs were expected to eliminate those deficits over a period of time. It was the opinion of many that these expectations and accompanying efforts distracted teachers and school administrators from the task of education, the primary purpose of schooling.

A teacher at Valleyview Junior High pointed out that she felt staffs tended to be reactive and become caught up with discussing various student and school rules and regulations. Her suggestion was that those kinds of issues be dealt with in committees, thus freeing up more teacher time to attend to professional-type issues directly related to the teaching-learning situation in the classroom. She advocated more of a proactive role, as opposed to a reactive one, for teachers and school administrators.

Seven features were listed by participants as impeding or hindering school improvement. Again, the researcher was left with the impression that these features were

practical, realistic, and comprehensive. Not as obvious to the researcher as those features which encouraged school improvement, these features did, however, present constraints to participants in their quest to achieve school improvement. Although they were very candid in discussing these features, participants did not appear to be fixated on them and seemed quite comfortable in acknowledging their existence. The researcher perceived a positive, proactive attitude among participants which was basically one of "Here are the difficulties or obstacles. We know that they are there; so how do we get around them?".

What other comments or concerns did teachers and school administrators have regarding the relationship between school-based management and school improvement?

To this question participants responded with a number of different comments and concerns. These ranged from comments of a positive nature to those that expressed considerable dissatisfaction with respect to a specific issue or concern. This section will deal only with comments and concerns related to topics that have not been previously addressed in the above text. Those comments and concerns involved the following:

- satisfaction with the relationship;
- small schools versus large schools;
- principal bias;
- entrenched principals.

Satisfaction with the relationship

The majority of participants expressed considerable satisfaction with the present relationship between school-based management and school improvement in their respective schools. They felt that this form of management was definitely preferable to a

centralized approach and those who had served under the centralized approach indicated quite emphatically that they would not want to go back to the pre-school-based management days in the Edmonton Public School District.

One of the teachers at Jordan High who had worked under both systems was very complimentary to the Edmonton Public School District for having gone to school-based management. He suggested that the transition "has improved the school climate, the decision making, and the wisdom of what's happening in the schools". A former administrator, who had decided to return to the classroom, was quite positive in his comments about the way the process worked at his school. He had this to say about his preference:

> I've administered under both systems and this is so much better than what we had before. It is like night and day. I would not like to go back to a centralized system as a teacher or an administrator. Someone was always pulling strings and some schools benefited more, depending on who knew who and so on. I like this model and I was very happy doing the budgeting and planning. Everyone would get involved.

Small schools versus big schools

Although not a commonly mentioned point, it was suggested by a couple of participants that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement might work more positively in a smaller school as compared to a larger school. Specifically, the difference being alluded to involved the number of teachers and the difficulty of ensuring that all teachers were meaningfully involved in the process. The teachers felt that the task should be made much easier with a smaller number of teachers.

Of the three schools involved in the study, Lincoln Elementary was significantly smaller as far as school enrollment and the number of teachers were concerned. Based on his

observations, the researcher would have to concur with those teachers who thought that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement would be greatly facilitated by a smaller number of teachers and students. The task of achieving meaningful involvement should, in theory, be more easily accomplished with that smaller number. However, not to be underestimated would be the skill level of the school administration, particularly that of the principal, in obtaining that meaningful involvement, irrespective of school size.

Principal bias

Again, this was not a continually recurring concern of study participants but from time to time the issue of principal bias did surface. It specifically arose when participants were discussing the issues of budgeting and programming. Past experiences of participants in other schools also played a part in their present thinking, especially if they thought they or their department had been unfairly treated with respect to budgeting and programming.

One teacher related the story of his department having its funding drastically reduced at a meeting where he was unavoidably absent because of another meeting at the school board office. This experience had obviously left that teacher very resentful and bitter of the process and he was very critical of the manner in which he had been treated. The teacher rightly or wrongly assumed, because of this experience, that the principal was anxious to downgrade or perhaps even eliminate his department.

This teacher stated quite emphatically that it was essential for the principal to give value to all school programs. He suggested that if there were a program or programs lacking in credibility, the onus should be on the school administration to work with those

directly involved in the program to eliminate any program deficiencies to increase program credibility and viability.

Entrenched principals

Another concern mentioned by participants was that if a principal had been in a school for a long time, the danger existed that certain patterns could set in and be very difficult to change. One teacher summarized her concerns in this way:

> I think if the principal has been at a school for a long time, what happens is patterns develop, patterns of what's considered important and what is not considered important that are very very difficult to break because there is just a whole feeling about where the monies go. And that's great if it works into your scheme of things but if it doesn't, it can certainly be a problem for you as an individual teacher.

This teacher did not offer any solution to this concern except to say that a teacher who might be in that situation should ensure that the staff is aware of that teacher's specific needs as they relate to the subject or department area. Another suggestion would involve the periodic transfer of school principals by the school board after a stay of five to six years in one school. It is the researcher's understanding that this practice is an established one in the Edmonton Public School District but there do exist principals, for whatever reasons, who have remained in schools for extended periods of time.

Having spent three months in three of the Edmonton Public schools, there was no doubt in the researcher's mind that there existed in those schools a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. This "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302) greatly diminished the possibility of the researcher being duped into thinking that all was well whereas in reality, the opposite was the case.

The comment suggesting that the relationship between school-based management and school improvement may function more positively in a smaller school because of the smaller numbers of stakeholders involved, particularly the teachers, would appear to be a valid point. However, it must be remembered that there are other factors which enter into the relationship, a primary one of course being school leadership.

With respect to the concern raised regarding possible "principal bias", the researcher suggests that it is incumbent upon all teachers to adequately make their case to the school administration regarding the needs of their classrooms and respective subject areas. Although the researcher did not observe any "bias" during his stay in the three schools, in all probability, the concern is a legitimate one especially when one considers that there are 198 schools in the Edmonton Public School District that operate under school-based management. Should "principal bias" surface in a school, the onus is on teachers to bring their concerns to the attention of the school principal. This should be done professionally and in accordance with the Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Ethics.

The other concern mentioned also had to do with administrators--that of "entrenched principals". Specifically, the concern revolved around principals continuing to do things in the same way they had done them for the past several years. Again, the onus is on the teachers to bring such concerns to the attention of the principal in question in a professional manner.

General Research Question

This study and the above subsidiary research questions were guided by the following general research question: Do teachers and school administrators perceive school-based management to result in school improvement? This section will discuss this question as it relates specifically to those subsidiary questions and to the study in general.

The subsidiary research questions formed the basis for the development of the interview questions. These interview questions represented a vehicle for the researcher to get teachers and school administrators talking about their perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Study participants discussed whether or not they felt school improvement was a goal of school-based management. They described specific school improvements in their respective schools which they determined had come about as a result of their schools operating under a school-based management model. They isolated and listed those school-based management characteristics which in their opinion had facilitated school improvement and those characteristics which had impeded school improvement. Participants also stated their concerns about the relationship which they felt needed to be addressed.

Participant responses represented a collective way of answering the general research question as to whether or not they perceived school-based management to result in school improvement. It was obvious to the researcher as a result of how they responded to the various questions, that they did indeed perceive school-based management to result in school improvement. Without exception and at times rather categorically, participants were able to articulate and elaborate on those results. That is not to say that they

perceived the relationship to be one which was perfect in every instance and unable to be further improved upon. On the contrary, participants appeared rather cogent and critical in assessing all aspects of the relationship.

In summary, based on their responses to the questions posed, and also on what the researcher observed in the three respective schools participating in the study, the researcher has concluded that teachers and school administrators perceived school-based management to result in school improvement.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study as guided by the general and subsidiary research questions. For each of these questions, summaries of participant responses were given, accompanied by appropriate quotations. Where relevant, the literature on school-based management was cited and discussed with respect to its being supportive of, or contradictory to, the findings gleaned from this study. Each section addressing the research questions concluded with appropriate comments by the researcher.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a summary of the study which includes the purpose, methodology and the findings as guided by the general and subsidiary research questions. Included in those findings are a number of emergent categories and themes characterizing the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Section two discusses the conclusions reached by the researcher as a result of the various findings detailed in Chapter 6. Finally, in the third section, a number of implications arising from those conclusions are listed and discussed.

Summary

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine teachers' and school administrators' perceptions with respect to the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. A secondary purpose of the study was to determine whether or not teachers and school administrators perceived school-based management to result in school improvement.

Methodology

The methodology used in the study was a case study approach whereby the researcher spent a period of four weeks in each of three schools in the Edmonton Public School District--an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school. During those four weeks in each of the three schools, the researcher interviewed teachers and

school administrators and observed the various activities going on each day. A total of 23 in-depth interviews were conducted. These interviews were then transcribed by the researcher and returned to each participant for verification purposes.

Following this, the interview and observation data were subjected to a qualitative analysis procedure utilizing several strategies as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Patton (1990). These strategies facilitated the researcher's identifying various themes and patterns running throughout the data. In addition to identifying a number of emergent categories and themes, the researcher was successful in arriving at several findings and conclusions.

Findings

In addition to the specific findings with respect to the general and subsidiary research questions that guided the study, a number of categories and themes describing the relationship between school-based management and school improvement emerged from the interview and observation data.

Those categories and their respective themes were as follows:

- descriptors: the notion of improvement as an underlying motivation; the amount of time involved; a preoccupation with funding and finances; the immediacy and local nature of the decision-making process; administrator dependence; student focus; meaningful involvement in the decision-making process; flexibility; a proactive nature; and trust;
- emphases: planning; professional development; importance of the community; accountability and results; needs; academic and non-academic aspects of school improvement; autonomy; and the importance of strong central services to the process;

- results: a holistic approach to school improvement; concrete improvements; creativity and initiative; wiser decisions; and the potential for competition among schools and teachers;
- concerns: the time factor; curriculum development; compliance with collective agreements and district policies; major capital expenditures; and a tendency to be preoccupied with management-type issues.

This study was driven by a general research question and several subsidiary questions. Each question accompanied by a brief summary of the answer to that question is listed below.

The study was guided by the following general research question: "Do teachers and school administrators perceive school-based management to result in school improvement?" Without exception, it was found that teachers and school administrators perceived school-based management to result in school improvement.

The following subsidiary research questions were also utilized:

1. Do teachers and school administrators perceive school improvement to be a goal of school-based management? Again, both groups of study participants stated quite unequivocally that they considered school improvement to be a goal of school-based management. They considered school improvement to be the underlying purpose for having that form of school governance.
2. What school improvement results, if any, do teachers and school administrators perceive occurring from the implementation of school-based management? Both groups of participants listed several examples of school improvement which, in their

opinion, had come about as a result of their schools operating under a school-based management model. These school improvements ranged from actual improvements in school facilities to improvements in the teaching and learning situation in the classroom. Actual examples cited by participants included the following: the hiring of a Math specialist to alleviate large class problems in Math classes in grades three and four; physical improvement to the school building's ventilation system by installing additional windows in a number of classrooms; the introduction of an academic challenge program to meet the needs of gifted students; the introduction of computer technology to assist in classroom instruction; the establishment of several school-community partnerships; and a significant increase in the number of students writing Alberta Education diploma exams.

3. What differences, if any, exist between what teachers and school administrators perceive those school improvement results to be? Although there were virtually no differences in the actual school improvement results listed by both groups, there did exist some nuances in the way that each group talked about those results. Suffice it to say that when the administrators spoke about those results, they appeared to be more concerned than the teachers, that the goals, objectives, and priorities articulated in the planning process to achieve those results, be linked to the goals, objectives, and priorities of the school district. Teachers, however, appeared to be desirous of a greater autonomy and independence in planning for those results.
4. What features or characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as encouraging or facilitating school improvement? Participants listed the following features of school-based management which they

perceived as encouraging or facilitating school improvement: the opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process; the school being an autonomous unit; the immediacy and the local nature of the decision-making process; the flexibility inherent in the decision-making process; the planning process; and the open and democratic nature of the decision-making process.

5. What features or characteristics of school-based management do teachers and school administrators perceive as hindering or impeding school improvement? Characteristics of school-based management perceived by participants to impede or hinder school improvement were as follows: the time commitment on the part of teachers and school administrators; an overdependence on the leadership style of the principal; adherence to collective agreements and district policies; the lack of a centralized curriculum department; the linkage of school goals, objectives, and priorities to those of the school district; the lack of a comprehensive system of measuring school improvement; and a preoccupation with management-type issues.

Study participants were also asked if they had any additional comments regarding the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Participants responded with comments on the following topics: satisfaction with the relationship between school-based management and school improvement; whether or not small schools have an advantage over large schools in the school-based management and school improvement relationship; principal bias; and entrenched principals.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions and their implications for a sustained positive relationship between school-based management and school improvement may now be stated.

Conclusion # 1

The leadership style of the school principal is the primary factor contributing to a successful relationship between school improvement and school-based management.

There were many factors which affected the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. However, according to participants in the study, none were as crucial to that relationship as the leadership style of the principal. This is not surprising considering the importance of the principal to all aspects of the school operation. What is significant is that the principal's leadership style in this relationship has not received the attention that it apparently deserves.

Conclusion # 2

School improvement should be the underlying reason for schools operating under a school-based management model.

When the Edmonton Public School District made the transition to school-based management beginning with the pilot project in 1976, the term--school improvement-- was not mentioned in the terms and parameters for the pilot which ran from 1976 to 1980 (Baker, 1977). However, the implication appeared to be that by decentralizing responsibility for decision making in the areas of staffing, curriculum, and budgeting and

accompanying that responsibility with the appropriate funding, it would facilitate the process of school improvement.

Conclusion # 3

The relationship between school-based management and school improvement can be characterized in terms of descriptors, emphases, results, and concerns.

In the researcher's discussions with teachers and school administrators, there was no dearth of commentary regarding this relationship. The majority of comments were of a positive nature especially as they related to descriptors, emphases, and results. There was constructive criticism from participants in their discussions of the various concerns they had regarding school-based management and school improvement.

Conclusion # 4

School improvement comes about as a direct result of schools operating according to school-based management principles and practices.

Utilizing school-based management principles and practices, according to the perceptions of study participants, consistently resulted in improvements to the school both from an academic and a non-academic perspective. It would seem that school improvement was a logical consequence of those principles and practices.

Conclusion # 5

School improvement is a goal of school-based management.

Although not always overtly stated as such, school-based management's primary focus is on school improvement. Why would a school and its staff tolerate the tremendous commitment of time, effort, and energy required in school-based management unless it

were of direct benefit to the school and its students. It would not make a modicum of common sense for teachers and school administrators to engage in school-based management unless school improvement was an obvious result of that process.

Conclusion # 6

Teachers and school administrators tend to be in agreement on the various school improvement results emanating from having school-based management in their respective schools.

This conclusion is not surprising especially when one considers the collaborative aspect of the school-based management and school improvement relationship as well as the open and democratic nature of the decision-making process. Both of these features are intrinsic to that relationship.

Conclusion # 7

Teachers desire greater school autonomy and independence in the relationship between school improvement and school-based management.

Although not expressed by school administrators in the study, there was a keen desire on the part of teachers for greater school autonomy and independence. They felt strongly that such autonomy and independence would allow them to exercise much more creativity and allow for greater risktaking in order to effect school improvement. In particular, the teachers articulated a dissatisfaction with being tied into the district's overall goals, priorities, and objectives and they indicated that this tie-in with the board stifled a proactive role.

Conclusion # 8

Inherent in school-based management are several characteristics or features which encourage or facilitate school improvement.

Teachers and school administrators easily identified those characteristics which they considered as helping the school improvement process. Those characteristics were intrinsic to the school-based management concept.

Conclusion # 9

Inherent in school-based management are several characteristics or features which hinder or impede the school improvement process.

Similarly, teachers and school administrators experienced no difficulty in being able to list those characteristics which they perceived as hindering school improvement. These characteristics were also innate aspects of school-based management.

Conclusion # 10

School-based management is definitely worth the investment of time, effort, and energy on the part of teachers and school administrators with respect to the attendant results in school improvement.

There is an abundance of commentary in the literature on school-based management questioning whether or not it is worth the time, effort, and energy expended by school personnel in terms of the results that it brings to the school. It was quite clear to the researcher that, although participants acknowledged the imperfections of school-based management, they also lauded the process and what it was able to achieve for their

schools. Participants expressed little interest in operating under a centralized system where decisions related to budgeting, staffing, and curriculum were made for them.

Conclusion # 11

School administrators having worked under a school-based management model will not want to change to a centralized system of school governance.

Having been a high school principal in a centralized system for eight years and prior to that, a teacher for 14 years also in a centralized system, the researcher, as a result of spending three months in decentralized schools in the Edmonton Public School System, had plenty of time to observe, compare, and reflect on the two systems. Without hesitation, the researcher is convinced that the decentralized system is a much more professional way to administer schools. However, prior to those three school visits, the researcher must admit that he was rather skeptical as to the value and worth of the school-based management concept.

Conclusion # 12

School-based management clearly represents a practical and viable means of bringing about school improvement.

Although the "jury is out" as far as the conclusions reached in the literature on school-based management are concerned, the researcher would feel very comfortable and justified in recommending to school districts that they actively consider the potential benefits of school-based management.

Conclusion # 13

School-based management, to be successful, requires a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication on the part of teachers and school administrators.

Make no mistake about it--school-based management with its potential for school improvement is not for those individuals who are not prepared to exert considerable energies in making the concept work. The researcher observed the concept in action and it was very obvious that the teachers and school administrators in the three schools were quite busy in making the concept work.

Conclusion # 14

The Edmonton Public School District needs to conduct a periodic review of school-based management and its relationship to school improvement.

Teachers and school administrators spoke of various concerns they had, especially those related to curriculum development. These concerns are worthy of note and the school district needs to engage in fuller dialogue with its teachers and administrators to address these concerns.

Implications

The findings and conclusions from this study present several implications of relevance to the fields of practice and research.

Implications for Practice

This study examined teachers and school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. It presented several benefits to those participating and to the sponsoring school district because it provided the

opportunity for participants to reflect and crystallize their thinking with respect to that relationship. Prior to this opportunity, participants may have taken the relationship for granted. They lived it on a daily basis and in the hectic and fragmented school day, they just went about their personal work schedules somewhat unconscious of the benefits accruing from that relationship.

It is therefore recommended that school administrators actively promote the relationship between school-based management and school improvement by periodically discussing it with their academic and support staff.

This could be done at regular faculty meetings or during special professional development activities aimed at school improvement. Such promotion may contribute to an increased creativity and risktaking on the part of school staffs in an effort to increase the positive aspects of the relationship.

Also, because it has been approximately 19 years since the Edmonton Public School District made the transition to school-based management, such an initiative runs the risk of having been around so long, that it is accepted without question by almost everyone in the district including board trustees, senior board administrators, and school personnel. The researcher perceived that periodic review and evaluation of the school-based concept and how it related to school improvement was not happening to the degree that it perhaps should and that many participants would welcome such a process to address a number of their concerns discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

It is therefore recommended that the school board initiate a process of review and evaluation of the relationship every three to five years and engage in meaningful dialogue with all of its publics (teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and the community at large) to determine weaknesses and shortcomings of the relationship and to come up with ways and means to address those areas identified.

The leadership style of the principal was mentioned earlier as being a primary factor in the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. A number of participants alluded to their past experiences where the leadership style of their respective principals was questionable. Inservice activities focusing on school-based management and school improvement and the requisite leadership skills would be worth considering for principals keen on honing those particular skills.

It is therefore recommended that inservice activities on school-based management and school improvement and the requisite leadership skills be made available to principals in the Edmonton Public School District on a regular basis.

A comment worthy of note has to do with the study's conceptual framework. In designing the study the researcher utilized the framework as depicted in Figure 2.1 on page 36. However, as the study unfolded, there emerged a somewhat different conceptual framework as depicted in Figure 5.1 on page 122, an occurrence which is fairly common in qualitative research. Although the original framework served the study well, the researcher considers the Figure 5.1 framework a more appropriate one for the study.

Implications for Research

This qualitative study involved the participation of three schools and 23 teachers and school administrators in the Edmonton Public School District. The limitations and

delimitations of such a study are acknowledged and have been stated in Chapter 1. For the purpose of generalizability it may be worthwhile for the school district to sponsor a larger study of a quantitative nature involving a greater number of schools in order to quantify and further identify those variables of concern to the relationship. Upon identification of concerns, the school district might then decide to develop a plan of action in consultation with the various stakeholders to address those concerns.

It is therefore recommended that the Edmonton Public School District conduct such a study for those reasons outlined in the previous paragraph

Concluding Comment

A final comment pertains to the utility of the study. This kind of study offers a variety of benefits to the following groups or individuals: the schools and their teachers and administrators; the host school board; and the researcher. Each of the three schools that participated in this study, along with its teachers and administrators, played host to the researcher for a period of four weeks. During that time, teachers and school administrators, who participated directly in the study, were asked to reflect on the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, a practice which doesn't happen too often in the hectic and fragmented day of today's educators in the Edmonton Public School District. Such an exercise is valuable because it forces participants to consider the goals, the strengths and weaknesses, and the day-to-day operation of a relationship that has existed in most Edmonton public schools for approximately 15 years. It is very easy for these educators to take this relationship for granted and to accept or reject it without having given it the appropriate consideration

that it might merit. Hosting a study such as this one provides educators with the opportunity to give it this consideration.

Another benefactor of this study is the Edmonton Public School District. The study can be viewed in terms of an independent quasi-evaluation of the relationship between school-based management and school improvement. Various questions and concerns get raised from a constructive criticism perspective as well as points of satisfaction from a positive perspective. The concept of school-based management is an evolving one and the findings and conclusions articulated in this study will hopefully be of value to the school district in its short and long term planning.

The researcher is obviously a benefactor in this process. A number of benefits accrue to the researcher:

- the opportunity to spend a significant period of time in three schools in a different part of Canada which is very definitely, in the least, an excellent exercise in professional development;
- the development and fine-tuning of a multitude of skills related to conducting qualitative research;
- the acquisition of considerable insight into how school-based management and school improvement are operationalized on a day-to-day basis;
- the development of an extensive network of educators actively working in school-based management in a Canadian province, some kilometers from the researcher's home province;

- and finally, the intrinsic satisfaction from knowing that the exercise was indeed an exceptional learning experience.

In conclusion, this researcher's motivation for spending the three months in the schools included his having adequate time to give back to the school and its educators some volunteer work in return for their co-operation in participating in the study. That volunteer work took the form of helping teachers perform their supervision duties, assisting teachers in working with students in the classroom, visiting classrooms and doing guest presentations, and engaging in professional dialogue with teachers and administrators. It is the researcher's hope that this objective was achieved.

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APPENDIX A

Schedule of School Visits

Schedule of School Visits

Sept. 26 - Oct. 21, 1994: Visit # 1 - Lincoln Elementary School

Oct. 24 - Nov. 18, 1994: Visit # 2 - Jordan High School

Nov. 21 - Dec. 16, 1994: Visit # 3 - Valleyview Junior High School

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Preamble: In this study the term "school-based management" will be used to refer to the process of decision making at the school level. Other terms commonly used in the literature to refer to this process are school-site budgeting, collaborative school management, and decentralized decision making.

1. What does the term "school-based management" mean to you?
2. In your opinion does school-based management exist in this school?
3. What does the term "school improvement" mean to you?
4. Generally speaking, do you consider school improvement to be a goal of school-based management? Please elaborate.
5. In this particular school, do you consider school improvement to be a goal of school-based management? Please elaborate.
6. From your experience as a teacher (or administrator) in this school, has school-based management resulted in school improvement? If it has, can you provide a general example of how it has resulted in school improvement?
7. Can you provide some other examples of school improvement which, in your opinion have come about as a result of this school operating according to school-based management practices? Please elaborate.
8. What categories (i.e. academic achievement; school climate; teacher effectiveness; financial status; general school governance etc.) do you see these school improvement results falling into?

9. What features or characteristics of school-based management in your opinion encourage or facilitate school improvement and can you provide some examples of this?
10. What features or characteristics of school-based management in your opinion impede or hinder school improvement and can you provide some examples of this?
11. If you had the authority to make changes in the way school-based management operates in your school, what changes would you make so as to allow school-based management to have a greater impact on school improvement?
12. Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding school-based management and school improvement?